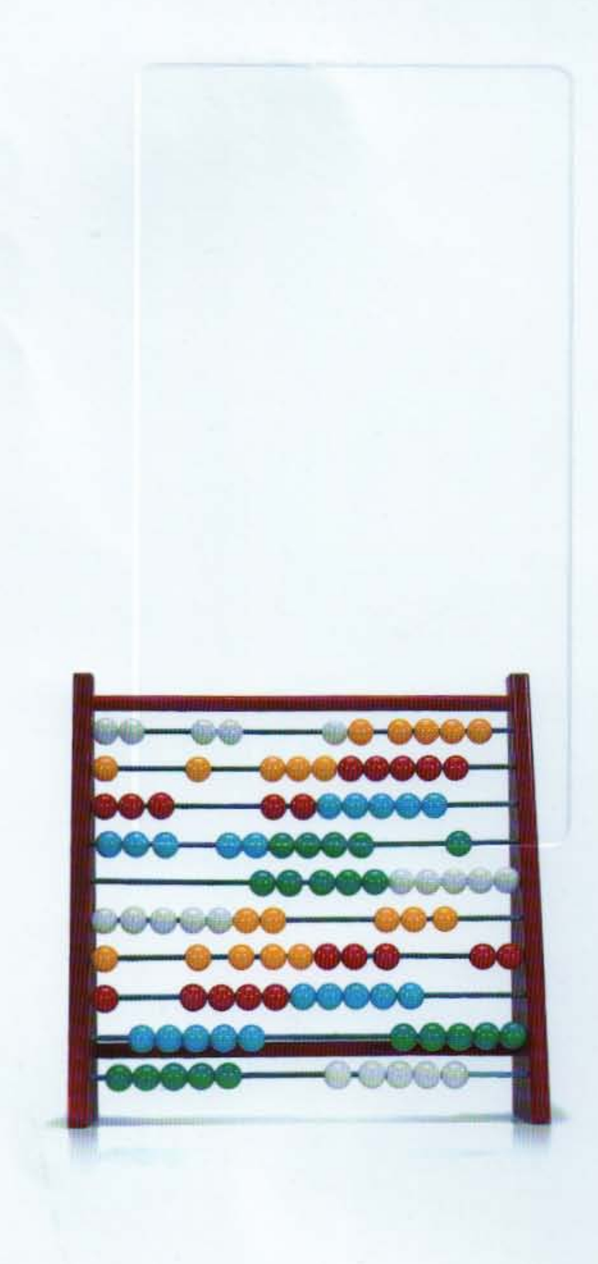
EDGE®









A car bearing the mark of the prancing horse invokes a special kind of passion among enthusiasts. In raw engineering terms, Ferrari automobiles may be works of art, but it's not simply what lies beneath the bonnet that inspires such fervour. It is something else, something at once intangible and yet supremely evocative.

Evocative to the point of the bizarre, in fact. How else can the existence of Ferrari's burial plot be explained? This expanse of land, situated at the company's Maranello HQ, is where, having exhausted their use but not willing to sell them on or consign them to the scrapheap, enthusiasts may pay for cars – slabs of nuts, bolts and metal curves – to be ceremonially lowered into the ground.

Owning a Ferrari is evidently a religious experience, and in the realms of desirability few things come close to owning this breed of car. Allying it with the must-have console of the moment therefore seems a wise manoeuvre. Discover how this marriage happened, and how it is progressing, on page 54.

There are many more PlayStation2 titles featured this month, including the first batch of finished efforts from Japan (see page 68). Be assured that the **Edge** team cast as discerning an eye over these games as was the case with the first wave of titles that kicked off PlayStation mania six years ago. Remember, this isn't the place to come for fawning hyperbole.

But excellence will continue to be championed, and in this regard the X-Box technology previewed on page 6 has accounted for this month's biggest noise. Partnered with NVidia, Microsoft clearly has a hot ticket on its hands. Now all it needs is the brand appeal of a Ferrari or a Sony...

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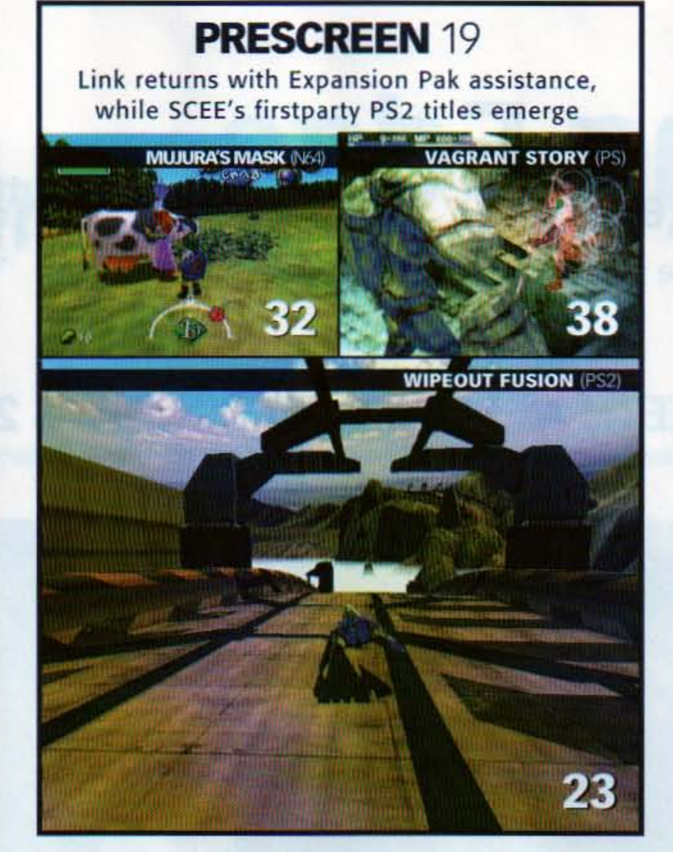
TESTSCREEN

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PRESCREEN 19

Link returns with Expansion Pak assistance, while SCEE's firstparty PS2 titles emerge





Jet Set Radio 40

Edge meets the team behind the hottest Dreamcast experience since *Soul Calibur*

X-BOX 06



Microsoft's PC-in-a-box and how it will change the way videogames are played

Cutting Edge

The latest news from the world of interactive entertainment

X-BOX BARES TEETH AS MICROSOFT CONFIRMS **2001 LAUNCH**

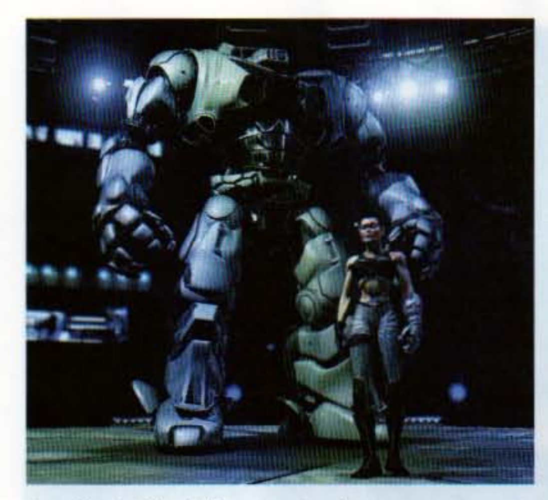
PC-derived technology is shown to developers and press as industry's biggest hitter prepares to tackle Sony's console dominance



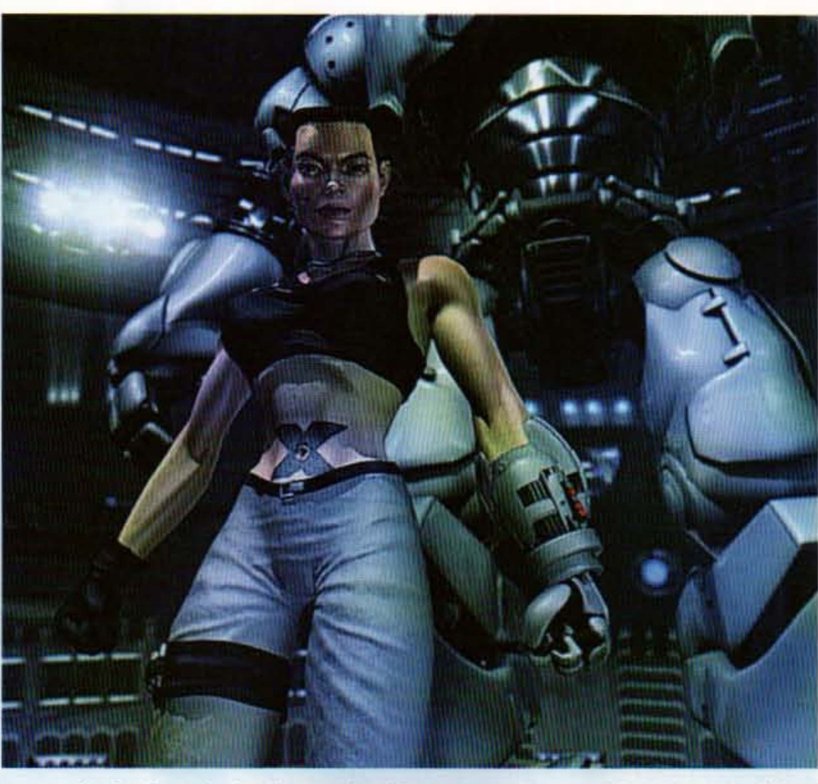
Jay Allard (left), head of the project, used a mock-up device (main) containing a Legacy 3 motherboard, DVD drive, x86 CPU and a "beyond generation ten" NVidia graphics chip during his presentation to Edge. It only crashed once

Microsoft's X-Box will launch in the US in autumn 2001, Bill Gates has confirmed. As expected, he used his opening address at the Game Developers Conference in San Jose to officially unveil plans for the platform, which will be delivered strictly as a videogame console, not a set-top box or multimedia unit as had previously been speculated.

"We want X-Box to be the platform of choice for the best and most creative game developers in the world," claimed the Microsoft chief. X-Box will be heralded by a $250m marketing campaign, which will surpass the hype of the massive launch of *Windows '95*. Pricing will be "competitive" compared to other consoles. A Euro release date is yet to be set by Microsoft, although documents suggesting a simultaneous worldwide launch have appeared.



According to Allard, this prerendered sequence represents around 25 per cent of the final console's graphical power



Rumoured to be the work of Midway coders, this sequence was super slick. In fact, everything Microsoft had to show bore the mark of a company deadly serious about the console market

Many heavyweight publishers have already expressed support for the new platform, including EA, Konami, Namco, Acclaim, Infogrames, Activision and Capcom. **Kagemasa Kozuki**, CEO of Konami, even went so far as to announce plans to organise an X-Box development team and bring titles for the platform to market before any other publisher. Such support is unheard of for a western-developed games console, and will be crucial for the success of the unit. Microsoft has formed a new dedicated games division in a bid to further cement developer support.

At the conference, technical demos on a prototype model were given, including a video showing prerendered graphics and examples of realtime physics. **Edge** was also given a presentation of the prototype and demos by X-Box platform manager **Jay Allard**, who stressed that there is no possibility of its "future generation" hardware turning into an unsatisfactory compromise between PC and console. X-Box will be sold strictly according to a console business model. At the heart of this plan will be a single product and a single brand, and the company insists that there are no plans for hardware upgrades beyond a modem that will be made available at launch. Microsoft points to its experience in videogame content and peripherals markets, drawing attention to the DirectX API, in support of claims that X-Box will enable developers to create "better games, faster."

PlayStation2 times three

Technical specifications offer what Microsoft claims amounts to "more than three times" the graphics performance of PlayStation2. By the time the device is launched, the 600MHz x86 CPU may seem dated in comparison to desktop PCs, but the custom-designed graphics chip, an NVidia unit that sits somewhere between its NV10 and NV15 generations, is set to deliver more than 300m polygons per second.

X-Box incorporates a unified memory architecture, allowing developers to decide for themselves how much to allocate to video, AI, physics, etc, which it's hoped will alleviate problems encountered by developers limited to 4Mb of VRAM on PlayStation2 projects. The biggest departure from other new consoles is the inclusion of an 8Gb hard disk. It is intended that the operating system will be lightweight and unobtrusive, and Microsoft hopes that the hard drive will be used by developers to allow the creation of "organic" games. Some Japanese developers have mooted using the drive as an extension of core memory, to store audio and visual information for use ingame – one particular codeshop firmly accustomed to the constraints of traditional console architecture was initially mystified, but eventually came to view it as raw memory for use on the fly, suggesting that it would be possible to allow the player to view a scene built using 50Mb of data from one direction and then sucking another 50Mb of scenery from the hard disk as the player panned around. Crucially, other developers look upon the hard drive's presence in a more cynical light. "Why do I think it's in there? Because X-Box uses *Windows*," one respected source, who wished to remain anonymous, told **Edge**. "Ask any PC developer. It's there because *Windows* cannot manage without it. Without it, it'll fall over."

Regardless, the facility will be used in conjunction with broadband comms as a storage medium for new levels and characters, making it possible to deliver episodic games,

"Why do I think it has a hard disk? Because X-Box uses Windows. Ask any PC developer. It's there because Windows cannot manage without it"

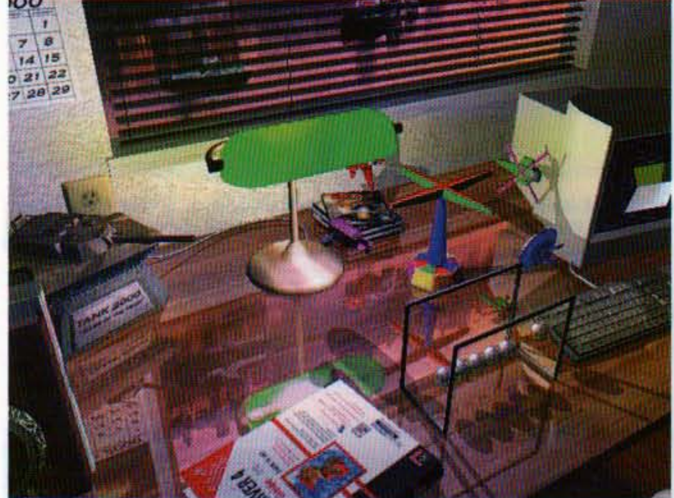
X-Box tech specs

CPU: 600MHz x86
Graphics processor: 300MHz
Total memory: 64Mb
Memory bandwidth: 6.4Gb/sec
Polygon performance: 300m/sec
Pixel fill rate (up to two textures): 4.8 G/sec (anti-aliased)
Maximum resolution: 1920x1080
Storage medium: 4x DVD, 8Gb hard disk, 8Mb memory card
Audio channels: 64
Joypad ports: four
Video out: multistandard, via region-specific adaptors
Additional features: 3D audio support, MIDI DLS2 support, AC3 encoded game audio

This demo looks like a prerendered still when booted up. Then the magic begins: DVD footage is streamed on to the window, visible through blinds, and the desk toys can be played with. Shadows which dance over backdrop details such as the calendar when the plane model is manoeuvred are extraordinary, and texture memory used in the scene is massive





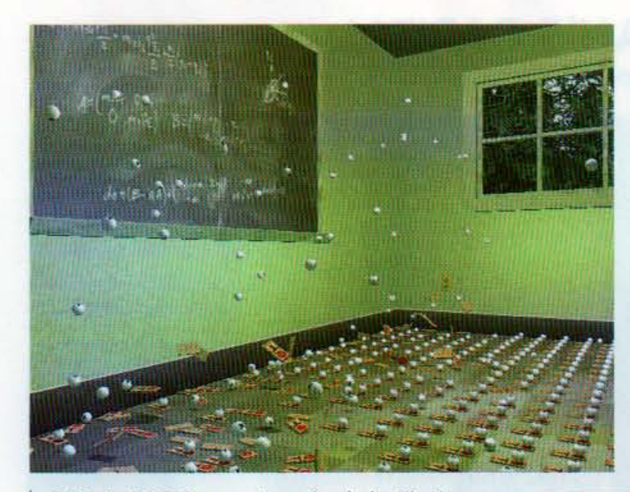








These X-Box sequences exude an unusual quality, delivering a feel somewhat akin to Pixar sequences. The beauty in this demo clearly lies not only with the number of polys being crunched in real time, but their behaviour. X-Box's slice-it-any-way RAM architecture has the potential to revolutionise videogaming



A total of 1,024 mousetraps loaded with ping pong balls cover the floor of a barren lab. Throwing another ball into the mix kicks off a manic chain reaction which demonstrates extraordinary physics. Allard 'accidentally' allowed this demo to switch into full tilt mode, and the transformation speed was staggering

much like TV serials, and download real-world information to be recreated in sports games and the like. One example cited by Allard is a Formula One game which could be enhanced by the use of real-world telemetry data, with 22 players taking the place of Schumacher and co on-screen.

The X-Box hard disc will be divided into three segments, one of which will operate in much the same way as a jumbo memory card, for save-game data. A second segment will be used as a cache, which will enable quick-access data – such as race commentary in the aforementioned Formula One example – to be copied from the host disc, which will allow faster, more relevant in-game access. The third section will be devoted to persistently available data, managed by a straightforward utility when the disk becomes full.

Although the hard drive will be used to carry upgrades and enhancements, Allard dismisses the possibility of patches appearing for X-Box games. Patches chiefly exist, he argues, because of the limitless permutations of PC boxes out there; once developers begin working on a single-spec platform, software testing at development stage will become a comparatively straightforward process.

It's too early to determine the type of quality control systems that will be in place when the console ships, and whether there will be software exclusivity arrangements – Microsoft wants to canvas developers' opinions. "We are working with developers to finalise exactly how they will want the system to work and putting together something that will work for everybody," points out Allard.

X marks the spot

Microsoft will not be drawn on the final appearance of the product. (Ironically, the X-shaped box used for tech demos, specifically designed to look completely impractical as a piece of consumer hardware, was lusted over by analysts during one Microsoft presentation.) Microsoft is aware that controller design is integral to the gameplay experience but will not detail any plans for innovation. X-Box will not initially ship with a keyboard or mouse, though these may be made available as peripherals. This falls in line with the company's vision of multi-device convergence, with the PC continuing to be part of Microsoft's plans for Internet access as well as certain genres of game that are not considered suitable for console videogaming. And despite offering broadband access, the X-Box will not have an Internet browser or email facilities. Instead, online gaming will be implemented through a simple interface, compared by Allard to an ATM.

The timing of the announcement, coinciding with the launch of Sony's PS2, demonstrates Microsoft's marketing savvy. Although it is still too early to judge its excursion into the waters of future generation gaming, it's certain that with strong support from leading thirdparties and excellent tech specs, X-box is shaping up to be a hugely desirable console. Asked whether or not the format's success will ultimately rest on the amount hard cash Microsoft will throw at it in an effort to make it work, Allard responds: "At the end of the day it's all about games. If developers work their magic on this platform I think it is going to do incredibly well. We are certainly giving them a great platform to start with."

Although the hard drive will be used to carry upgrades and enhancements, Allard dismisses the possibility of patches appearing for X-Box games

Demos in detail

Edge was shown a selection of software running on a prototype X-Box system which, it was claimed, demonstrated approximately one tenth of the polygon-pushing power of the finished console. Appropriately, the unit crashed approximately 15 minutes into the presentation (the previous evening Allard had blown a fuse while attempting to fire up the unit in his hotel room in London, and he was no longer risking operation of the green light which formed the focal point of the device), but teething problems aside, performance levels were impressive.

The first demo came as a surprise, as it emulated the famous fireworks PS2 demo, albeit throwing multicoloured lighting and animation into the mix, just for the hell of it. A marble-effect floor texture offered clean reflection. Allard claimed that this piece of code had been crafted in three days by a student with no prior knowledge of DirectX during a stay at the Microsoft campus.

A further demo, which Allard claimed took all of one day to put together, depicted a square pool of water surrounded by textures made up of photography from the lobby of Microsoft's HQ. The backdrop could be panned around, *QuickTime VR* style, and the water manipulated to reveal realtime reflection and refraction effects. Panning the camera down to pool level, the realism in the scene became clear, as the photographic details played off the water surface.

HOW PLAYSTATION2 ROCKED JAPAN'S CAPITAL

Most successful console launch in history creates scenes of hysteria as Sony's box goes live

Photography: Hiroki Izumi

Eager gamers queued through the night. Some scrabbled for pieces of cardboard to sit on, while the better prepared had brought blankets, tables and chairs. The most enterprising group, however, brought along a television, generator and a PlayStation and PC Engine Duo-R with which to pass the time

PlayStation2 fever

The PlayStation2 launch brought with it the kind of behaviour not witnessed in Japan since the last instalment of mega RPG series *Dragon Quest* became available.

On the night of March 3, one punter who learned that he would not be able to get hold of a console the following day launched himself from a roof in Akihabara in a desperate suicide bid. The hapless game freak failed and was taken to hospital with injuries.

On the same night, in the same district, a gang of thieves raided a game store in an attempt to bag their own batch of machines, but were arrested by police. Another incident involved a young boy being attacked on his way home to Tokyo's Saitama district. Two older males made off with his prized PS2.

In raw box-shifting terms, March 4 will go down in history as the most successful console launch in history. The arrival of PlayStation2 created scenes of hysteria in Japan not witnessed since the launch of the Super Famicom and, more recently, Sega's Saturn, with media crews circulating across Tokyo in helicopters to cover the event.



Despite the activity, Sofmap expected even larger queues

Sony attempted to distribute PlayStation2 stocks evenly across the capital's main electric retail areas, yet some outlets were restricted to 150 units, while others carried as many as 1,000. Whatever the quantity, the piles of PS2 units rapidly disappeared like snow melting in the sunshine.

Japanese gamers were prepared to queue through the night in order to get a slice of the action, and retailers assisted those unprepared for chilly conditions with heat patches.

Official figures from SCEI for the period March 4-6 indicated that 480,000 units were sold via its own Internet service, and 620,000 through stores. The high number pushed via online sales gave more evidence of Sony's plans to move hardware and software distribution away from the traditional high-street model.

Following launch, demand remained high, which was reflected on Yahoo!'s Japanese auction Web site. Some fortunate enough to have nabbed PS2 units made them available to online punters, with prices ranging from ¥45,000 (£270) to ¥120,000 (£720). One entrepreneur offered ten consoles at a starting price of ¥400,000 (£2,400).

Some of the Japanese videogame industry's biggest hitters made the trip to downtown Tokyo in order to witness the launch spectacle, including Ken Kutaragi, who came late at night with his own pocket camera, presumably to reassure himself that his next ambitious step was working. By dawn any fears were quashed and the SCEI president appeared at the countdown to launch in daylight in front of the







Launch quantities varied widely across Tokyo, with some stores clearly offering more stock than others (main). The gravity of the event, which could be likened to the Super Famicom's launch, drew media interest (top right)

giant TV screen outside Shibuya's JR station, going on to Akihabara where he held a small press conference in both Japanese and English.

Teething problems

As with any launch of this scale, however, not everything ran entirely smoothly, and several stores were faced with angry customers returning faulty units. At the Bic Camera Ikebukuro store, meanwhile, a faulty PlayStation2 demo unit could be witnessed in action the day after launch, with road and trackside details flashing and disappearing in *Ridge Racer V*, and part of the game image appearing upside down. Playing *Street Fighter EX3* on the machine resulted in missing polys.

No problems have yet been encountered with **Edge**'s base PlayStation2 hardware, although, after some weeks of regular use, a memory card has decided to unformat itself, reverting to its original, raw state. Like any manufacturer, Sony is replacing any goods found to be faulty.

In DVD terms, the 'hidden bonus' gamers have discovered (see 'DVD in detail') has caused Sony to issue replacement driver discs.

More news next month.

DVD in detail

One of PlayStation2's most intriguing elements, its DVD movie playback ability, has been under immense scrutiny since the console made its Japanese debut. Crucially, using a simple joypad sequence upon powering up the unit, it's possible to circumnavigate region lockouts, allowing US Region 1 discs to be played (UK Region 2 discs clearly will not work since the Japanese unit cannot output a PAL signal). Sony has recently issued a new drivers CD which remedy this quirk, but many users are not 'upgrading'.

In use, DVD quality is much better than what appeared to be the case at the March PlayStation Festival. The level of artefacts and pixellation previously in evidence simply no longer exists.

Fan noise can be obtrusive during quiet scenes, however, and Dolby Digital playback, while good, is not as expansive as on quality dedicated players.

Using 'A Bug's Life' (the first direct digital transfer DVD movie) reveals a few glitches, including refusal to play widescreen mode, but US 'Blade' and 'The Matrix' play perfectly (bar DVD-ROM features, obviously).













Following the Japanese debut, SCEE has revealed a selection of firstparty PS2 titles due in the 12 months following UK launch (clockwise from top left): *Drakan, Getaway, Spin: Sprint Car Racing, Formula One 2000, Wipeout Fusion,* and *Dropship*. A rally game and a *This Is Football* update are also mooted

SEGA STEALS SHOW AS SONY **LACKS LUSTRE IN TOKYO**

Spring's Tokyo Game Show proves underwhelming and under-attended, leaving few stars to come out and shine



In the absence of many new titles, Sony fell back on the likes of *Fantavision* (a game that was already on sale) and robot-driven actioner *Armored Core 2*

Photography: Hiroki Izumi

The Japanese videogame industry recession seemed responsible for one of the lowest turnouts at the Tokyo Game Show which kicked off at the end of March. Despite the release of PS2, the spring event saw few SCEI titles emerge, and thirdparty support lacked weight. The lean times saw some developers joining up and sharing booths, and the absence of recent casualties, hit by poor game sales, left a bitter taste.

After the PlayStation2 Festival and the release of the PS2 in March, SCEI put in a weak showing considering the hefty size of the line-up it proffered when its new console was initially announced. Presumably the company is holding its wares for E3 in May. Only *DJ TV* (formerly *Be On Edge*) made an impact, with titles such as *Extermination*, *GT2000*, *Densen* and *Dark Cloud* conspicuous by their absence.

There was a handful of new titles from thirdparties, however. Konami showed three: *Red*, *ZOE* and *Walpurgis*. *ZOE*, produced by Hideo *Metal Gear Solid* Kojima, was perhaps the most striking. An action adventure shoot 'em up featuring giant robots, the game is similar in style to Sega's *Virtual On*, although Kojima-san suggested that the game will offer a feel reminiscent of *Ocarina of Time*. Its atmosphere is Gundam-esque, with children controlling gigantic robots.

Koei, meanwhile, revealed the sequel to its Japanese fighting game *Sangokumuso*. Making use in part of the *Kessen* engine, *Shin Sangokumuso* aims to more fully exploit PS2. The

player moves freely in a limited area, while a map in the corner of the screen displays the player's and enemies' positions. The combatants exchange weapon blows and magical attacks while battle rages around them, generating an enormous number of enemies on-screen.

Kadokawa, meanwhile, offered *Orphen*, an action game featuring *Tomb Raider*-style action. With traps galore and large boss characters reminiscent of those in N64 *Castlevania*, it may be one to watch, despite the developer's limited track record. From Software's *Armored Core 2* looked similar to *Virtual On* but with slower mechs and less dynamic action. The option of flight offers a little compensation, while audio manages AC-3 to great effect, and numerous combinations in robot customisation are offered. But although *Armored Core 2*'s stages are quite well designed, *Virtual On* retains its lead, with superior balance of gameplay and stage design.



Attendance was down from last autumn's event, with 131,708 attendees – a drop of 32,158. Namco's endeavours in entertaining those who did make it came largely in the form of banks upon banks of *Tekken Tag Tournament* pods

Sega stands alone

With Sony sidelined, Sega came armed to gain ground in the console battle, offering a diverse line-up. Its biggest canon was *Jet Set Radio* (see p40) – without a doubt the game of the show, easily outshining many PS2 titles in gameplay and technology terms.

Many expected better Dreamcast support from Konami and Namco. The latter's *Mr Driller* was an appealing puzzler with 2D graphics, but a *Soul Calibur 2* would have been a greater crowd-puller for Sega.

Sega further demonstrated Dreamcast's Internet capabilities with the reinforcement of online titles and services, while Capcom showed off *Power Stone 2* and *Marvel vs Capcom 2* in online play configuration, the former allowing visitors to play against Capcom staff over in Osaka.

Sega went into battle against Konami in the field of motion-sensor technology. The latter revealed a small, stick-shaped extension for the PlayStation, with which players control an orchestra. Sega's *Samba de Amigo* (see p50), meanwhile, succeeded in delivering a more convincing sensation.



While Sony wilted, Sega grabbed the opportunity by the horns, showing its commitment to online gaming, and the show's killer title, *Jet Set Radio*

Battle of the RPGs?

Many expected a TGS clash between *Dragon Quest VII* and *Final Fantasy IX* but it simply didn't happen, with the release date of Enix's game still shrouded in mystery. (Had the title been released at the end of '99, analysts predicted, it would have moved five million units; a figure of three million is now being mooted.) Square merely displayed a rolling video of its game, which will hit Japanese stores in July.

Other RPGs that did make an appearance included DC titles *Eternal Arcadia* (Sega) and *Grandia II* (Game Arts). A handful of online RPGs were







Sega showed DC peripherals in the form of a VMS MP3 player, mobile phone connector, and Dreameye digital camera unit





***Eternal Arcadia* was afforded one of the event's most lavish stands (left), and SNK's *Cool Cool Toon* one of the funkiest (top left). RPG *Grandia II* (above)**

on show, too, Sega's *Phantasy Star Online* (see p46) looking the most advanced. Hudson's *Rune Jade* competed with Kadokawa's *Record of Lodoss War* in the *Diablo*-alike category, but *Phantasy Star*'s more original gameplay, clearly aimed at traditional console users, proved a bigger draw to Japanese onlookers.

Online is the key

Just about every exhibitor brought along its own take on online activity. Sega focused its titles and services (via ISAO) around Dreamcast. The company also unveiled its mobile phone connection kit, in addition to its Ethernet and ISDN upgrades. Sega.com, meanwhile, used *10six* to demonstrate the Heat.net service.

In the light of the PS2's successful launch, it may have seemed odd to some that only 65 publishers turned up at the Tokyo event. But some Japanese pundits maintain that the 'golden age' of videogaming has passed

As well as Capcom's showing of *Power Stone 2*'s online play options, the company reinforced its mobile phone melody dispenser services. (Yes, only in Japan.)

Bandai focused all its resources on its WonderSwan, showing the Wonder Gate add-on – a connection kit for mobile phones. The company plans to make a robot remote control kit available to Japanese consumers soon. Another planned kit will enable infrared communication between WonderSwan and PS2, and it will be intriguing to see how developers make use of the facility (if, indeed many pick up on it at all – Bandai's handheld is still a minor-league system compared to Nintendo's all-pervasive Game Boy).

Scaling down

In the light of the PS2's successful launch, it may have seemed odd to some that only 65 publishers turned up at the Tokyo event. But some Japanese pundits maintain that the 'golden age' of videogaming has passed, citing sales of *Ridge Racer V* as evidence. At 350,000 units to date, the game has not leapt from the shelves as Namco might have expected. Other PS2 titles are obviously selling in lower numbers, and Dreamcast sales do not offer any brighter figures.

Sony's machine does have a new focus in DVD movies, however. Japan





Sega shouted its online strategies very loudly, and Japanese gamers lapped it up. But innovation was on hand elsewhere, too, with the company demonstrating its clever *Samba de Amigo* controller (see p50), and others getting sporty (left)

has seen a fivefold increase in movie sales in DVD guise, and 'The Matrix' – routinely referred to as the format's killer app – has ridden the wave by being released in three editions.

Unfulfilled expectations

It was clear that, without a number of large-scale PS2 titles from CEI, the spring TGS was not going to fulfil expectations, yet Sega managed a resoundingly strong showing. The fact that the event fell between the PlayStation Festival and E3 had an effect, and SCEI must certainly be preparing a few major cards to play at the Los Angeles expo.

Sega's showing should not be discounted, but the company must now maintain momentum in Japan. A Microsoft X-Box presentation at a hotel near the Tokyo Game Show would no doubt have served to remind Sega that it's not just Sony whose moves it must counter, and with Dolphin expected to be revealed at Space World 2000 in August, there's a certain other company to consider, too.













Some TGS offerings, clockwise from top left: Konami's *ZOE* (PS2), SNK's *Cool Cool Toon* (DC), From's *Armored Core 2* (PS2), Sega's *Rent A Hero No.1* (DC), Koei's *Shin Sangokumuso* (PS2), Realvision's *Zusar Vasar* (DC)

JES Awards

March 30 saw the Japan Entertainment Software Awards take place in Ginza. The results for 1999 were as follows:

Overall winner: *Dokodemo Issho* (PS, SCEI)
Game design: *Dokodemo Issho*
Programming: *Soul Calibur* (Namco, DC)
Graphics: *Legend of Mana* (SquareSoft, PS)
Movie: *Final Fantasy VIII* (SquareSoft, PS)
Character: *Dokodemo Issho*
Scenario: *Valkyrie Profile* (Enix, PS)
Sound: *Dance Dance Revolution* (Konami, PS)
New wave: *Seaman* (Sega, DC)
Foreign title: *Age of Empires II* (Microsoft, PC)

GAME INDUSTRY RAGES AT DISPATCHES VIDEO NASTIES

ELSPA lodges complaint at Channel 4 show's "biased, irresponsible" claims about videogames

The 'Dispatches' programme 'Video Nasties', which set out to prove a link between violent videogames and aggressive behaviour in children, has been heavily criticised by media pundits and leading psychologists. The Channel 4 show broadcast on March 23 has also been denounced by ELSPA director general **Roger Bennett** as "unfair, biased, and extremely irresponsible."

Subject to several viewer complaints, the programme came under fire from Channel 4's own 'Right to Reply' in which leading psychologist Guy Cumberbatch said he was astounded that the programme failed to consider any hypothesis other than videogames make people violent.

Though 'Dispatches' maintains that a balanced approach was adopted, ELSPA is angry that consultation was declined and has lodged a formal complaint with Channel 4 and the ITC. "There are many well-known and well-researched studies which examine the subject of computer games and potential links to violent behaviour, all of which conclude that there is no evidence that such links exist," added Bennett.

The programme was broadcast in the same month that a US Congressional committee looked into the issues surrounding the Paducak High School shootings in 1997, in which 14-year-old Michael Carneal killed three pupils and injured five others. The victims' parents are attempting to sue organisations including Sega, Sony, Nintendo, the makers of 'The Basketball Diaries' and two Internet porn sites.

'Dispatches' presented news footage of the aftermath of the school tragedy juxtaposed with images of children playing *Doom*, which prompted criticism from media studies expert **Dr Martin Barker** of Sussex University. "The film sequences were designed to create panic among parents," he claimed. In one notable sequence, presenter Joe Layburn was seen emphasising shoot 'em ups and fighting games by feebly miming actions to camera. Barker claimed this represented "tabloid TV at its very worst," calling the program "fatuous and unscientific." He also claimed that the makers did not demonstrate an understanding of the way in which people view and experience the stimuli in question.



Footage of children in arcades was a 'Dispatches' fave. The *Carmageddon* series (right) was also cited as a threat

'Dispatches' presented news footage of the aftermath of Paducak school shooting alongside images of children playing *Doom*: "designed to create panic" says one expert

The program also presented a view that videogames can instruct people in the use of firearms. Ex-military training officer **Lt Colonel David Grossman** provided anecdotal evidence for the programme. Referring to Carneal, Grossman said: "Eight shots on eight different kids. Five of them were head shots, the other three were in the torso. He just put one bullet in every target that popped up on his screen. What's he doing? He's playing a stinking videogame."

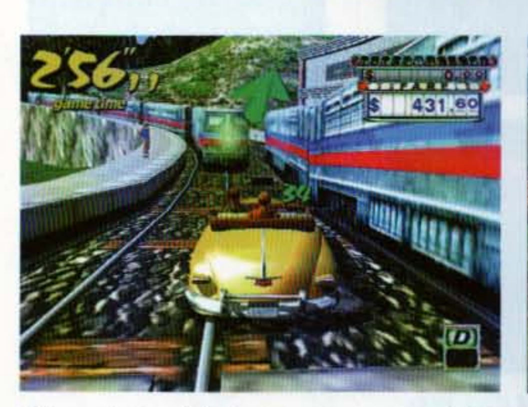


Joe Layburn demonstrated some of his own fighting skills

Games in the dock

Videogames under scrutiny as part of a lawsuit said to be worth $130m (£82):

Carmageddon
Mortal Kombat
Doom
Quake
Grand Theft Auto
Duke Nukem





Before and after: without reference to any research, 'Dispatches' claimed that games such as *Crazy Taxi* and *Grand Theft Auto* encouraged children on a Cardiff housing estate to steal and firebomb these vehicles

PRESCREEN

EDGE PREMIERES INTERACTIVE ENTERTAINMENT'S FRESHEST FACES

In for a dollar, in for a paradigm

So many alternative realities, but where is the progress?

From Aristotle through to Hollywood film makers, it has been maintained that there are only eight possible stories to be told. And a similar theory would seem to hold true within the videogame world – albeit on a slightly grander scale. Count them yourself: RPG, shoot 'em up, beat 'em up, racing, sports, platform, puzzle, FPS, wargame, and any other title touched by Peter Molyneux.

Will the next generation of videogames advance through incremental steps or should players prepare themselves for a paradigm shift? The move from 2D to 3D presentation was an obvious one, but how many games have managed to take full advantage of this technological and conceptual leap? Before they begin crafting levels and characters for yet another leap into the future, some developers might want to first focus on engineering a game camera which spends less time pointing at the ground.

Recent peeks at developers' forthcoming works indicate that a seismic rift in the videogame space-time continuum is not about to occur. *Hresvelgr* neatly attempts to update the *Wipeout* formula by providing wide expanses of landscape to cruise over – although the inclusion of checkpoints significantly narrows the focus. *Phantasy Star Online*, meanwhile, promises cooperative play in a captivating world – yet the fact that four players are required to operate four independent switches to open up new areas is hardly pushing online technology to its limits.

Realism may be the key. *Shenmue* excels by offering a day-to-day alternate world which, through attention to detail and a high level of interaction with the environment, engrosses the player. But does the push towards creating another version of accepted reality indicate progress? Yes, immersion in a videogame can liberate players from conventional modes of behaviour and moral constraints – so long as it remains a means of escape, not a reminder of when to put the bins out.

Having overtaken the film industry in terms of profitability, the videogame market continues to fail in challenging conceptual boundaries. Football and racing games are never out of the charts.

But there *must* be fresh ideas out there forming in the minds of visionaries. Will it be the old-school heroes of coding who bring them to fruition?





While *Hresvelgr* and *Phantasy Star Online* offer novel twists on old genres, *Shenmue* explores the oldest theme of all: reproducing reality. (How well will it sell to the mainstream, though?)

Edge's most wanted

Identifying the hottest incoming blips

			
Jet Set Radio	**Super Runabout**	**Ferrari 360 Challenge**	**SPIN: Sprint Car Racing**
(DC) Sega	**(DC) Climax**	**(PS2) Acclaim**	**(PS2) SCEE**
No, it won't really cause a nationwide graffiti breakout, but Sega's title has the potential to inspire the gaming community in more subtle ways.	Realtime damage, frantic, reckless driving and slick visuals make this 128bit update of a likeable concept a potential must-have DC title this year.	Already an accomplished racer even at this early stage, if this succeeds in capturing the Ferrari magic it will send ripples across the racing scene.	A popular sport in the US, the dangerous, high-speed world of sprint car racing is headed towards PlayStation2. Full damage dynamics are promised.

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PRESCREEN ALPHAS

THE *GOLDENEYE* TEAM FINALLY UNVEILS ITS GO-IT-ALONE PROJECT AS PS2 TITLES DOMINATE THE HOT PICKS

TIME SPLINTERS

FORMAT: **PLAYSTATION2** DEVELOPER: **FREE RADICAL DESIGN**





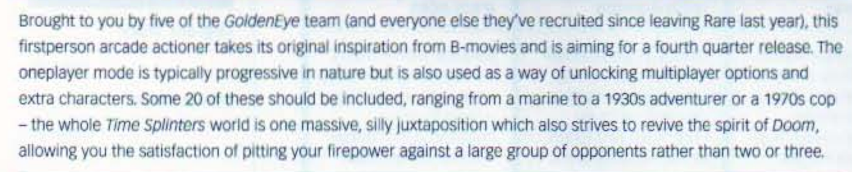








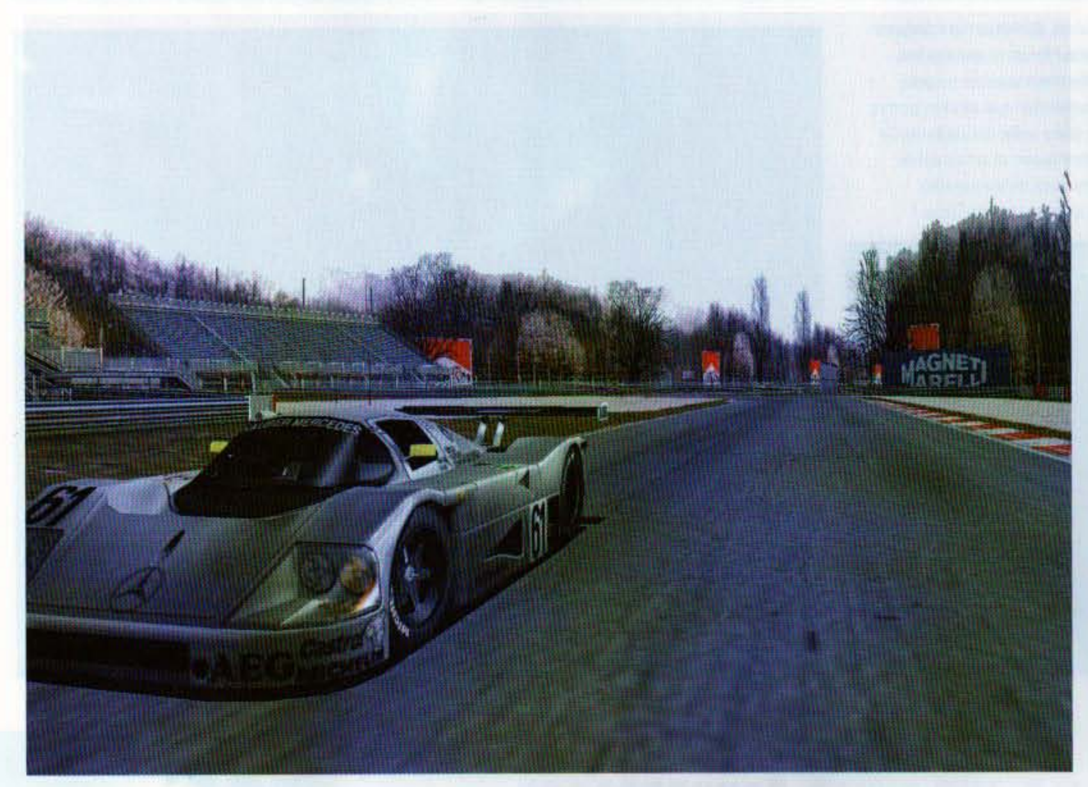




Brought to you by five of the *GoldenEye* team (and everyone else they've recruited since leaving Rare last year), this firstperson arcade actioner takes its original inspiration from B-movies and is aiming for a fourth quarter release. The oneplayer mode is typically progressive in nature but is also used as a way of unlocking multiplayer options and extra characters. Some 20 of these should be included, ranging from a marine to a 1930s adventurer or a 1970s cop – the whole *Time Splinters* world is one massive, silly juxtaposition which also strives to revive the spirit of *Doom*, allowing you the satisfaction of pitting your firepower against a large group of opponents rather than two or three.

WORLD SPORTS CARS

FORMAT: **PC** DEVELOPER: **WEST RACING**















Astonishingly, *World Sports Cars* is the work of just two individuals – one coder, one artist – based in Woking. Having previously produced the likeable *Street Racer* for the SNES (their last project, a rally game, was cancelled), brothers Chris and Tony West have bounced back with an exciting racing sim bound to engulf serious racing players. Everything that happens at a race weekend – from unloading the car from the trailer to driving into the pits and lining up on the grid – is left to the player's discretion. Physics are expected to match that of *Grand Prix Legends*, arguably the most realistic of racers, and pit stops allow players to perform any desired task – from attaching the fuel hose to wiping the windscreen clean. Importantly, realtime damage also features. The licensed cars are modelled inside and out and are panel based, meaning anything that opens up on the real-life equivalent also functions in the polygonal version, allowing for some strong damage effects as well as further enhancing *WSC*'s massive gameplay potential.

Z.O.E.

FORMAT: **PLAYSTATION2** DEVELOPER: **KONAMI**

Konami's dream team of Hideo Kojima (producer), Shinkawa Yoji (character design) and Noriaki Okamura (writer) have joined forces to develop this Gundam-inspired 3D shooter. Children pilot the mech warriors in battle scenes reminiscent of *Virtual On*. However, Kojima-San has announced that RPG elements will play a major part and that many of the concepts will be closer to *Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time*. The mixture of all-out action blasting and RPG exploration might just be the title's defining quality. With a solid team of this calibre, the game is definitely one to follow.





WIPEOUT FUSION

FORMAT: **PLAYSTATION2** DEVELOPER: **SCEE (STUDIO LIVERPOOL)**





The team behind the game that almost singlehandedly defined the Playstation as the console of choice for the clubbing generation are back. Set in 2150AD and featuring the new Wipeout F9000 league, vehicles in this sequel boast 48 parameters to define handling as opposed to just seven in the original, as well as true anti-gravity manoeuvrability. Another interesting development is the promise that sections of track will be freeform and interactive in nature. With the addition of new tracks, ships, weapons and game modes, *Fusion* also promises to be more accessible than previous instalments in the series.

HRESVELGR

FORMAT: **PLAYSTATION2** DEVELOPER: **GUST**

A *Wipeout* for the next generation? Taking place over landscapes rather than tracks, *Hresvelgr* promises many unusual gameplay innovations. Energy is the player's lifeblood – should this run dry then your craft plummets; checkpoints are available, where refuelling is possible. Cunningly, though, your ship's altitude affects just how much energy is absorbed, and it also significantly affects speed and handling – flying low to the ground and flying through crumbling buildings will no doubt provide heart-stopping moments. For added drama, certain unexpected random events can be triggered, such as rocks falling in your path. With pits, weapons, shields and team tactics to contend with, *Hresvelgr* could be an interesting racer.











THE GETAWAY

FORMAT: **PLAYSTATION2** DEVELOPER: **SCEE (STUDIO SOHO)**







Studio Soho has painstakingly recreated 70 square kilometres of London to offer players the opportunity to immerse themselves in the seedy underworld of vice and corruption. In *The Getaway* it will be possible to explore this 3D world either on foot or in a stolen car. Over 50 cars will be available, based on real-life models, and characters in the game will be derived from the likenesses of real actors in order to convey a gritty sense of realism. But with players able to perform stunts like two-wheel races down back alleys, the gameplay is likely to be a shade on the arcade side. A rudimentary plot involving the kidnapping of the lead character's son introduces the action, with the player taking on the most feared man in organised crime to free his kidnapped son. Although the 3D visuals and dubious morality of the game will no doubt outrage Middle England, if the ingame action matches the quality of the rendered screenshots shown here, this title should be one to watch.

FORMULA ONE 2000

FORMAT: **PLAYSTATION2** DEVELOPER: **SCEE (STUDIO LIVERPOOL)**

Although the market is flooded with Formula One games, each vainly hoping to bring something new to the genre, Studio Liverpool's title is the first to appear on Playstation2. The incorporation of all the tracks, teams and drivers of the real thing is almost to be expected. However, a customisable replay feature and the ability to store rankings to memory card will not appear especially groundbreaking to genre watchers, so hopefully the spatial stereo audio and improved graphics will set this apart from its peers.





COOL COOL TOON

FORMAT: **DREAMCAST** DEVELOPER: **SNK**















Puzzle games seem to be at the forefront of Dreamcast's present online onslaught, and after the success of *Chu Chu Rocket* comes this vibrant title from SNK, due out in Japan in July. Gameplay consists of frantically matching the cursor with coloured command balls, then pressing the corresponding button. Credits won can be used in the online shop to customise the game with extra costumes and options. Interestingly, the Neo Geo Pocket version is required to open up hidden bonus levels.

SHIN SANGOKUMUSO

Though viewed from directly behind the main character, *Shin Sangokumuso* seems to have leanings closer to an arcade style of fighting than Koei's other PS2 title, *Kessen*. A meter indicates how many enemies have been killed by the player, while another gauge shows the morale of his troops. Intelligent management of weapons and forces are necessary to overcome the opposition which can range in complexity from footsoldiers to heavy cavalry. Tactics will still play a major part – rallying the troops and bolstering the areas of greatest weakness are merely two of the strategies which can be employed.







DROPSHIP

FORMAT: **PLAYSTATION2** DEVELOPER: **SCEE (STUDIO CAMDEN)**

Attempting to combine air-to-air and air-to-ground combat elements with realtime strategy, *Dropship* hopes to immerse the player into an epic war, the course of which being altered by his or her actions. You'll assume the role of a rookie pilot expected to deliver troops and artillery to strategic positions and then interact with them in the ensuing battles. Although consoles are not the natural home of realtime strategy games, Studio Camden's attempt to sabotage established formulae should be praised and will hopefully make this title play up to the more laidback approach of most console gamers.









DRAKAN

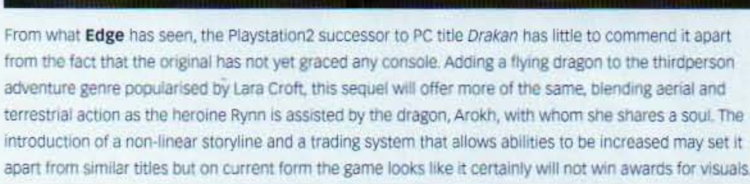
FORMAT: **PLAYSTATION2** DEVELOPER: **SURREAL DEVELOPMENT**











From what **Edge** has seen, the Playstation2 successor to PC title *Drakan* has little to commend it apart from the fact that the original has not yet graced any console. Adding a flying dragon to the thirdperson adventure genre popularised by Lara Croft, this sequel will offer more of the same, blending aerial and terrestrial action as the heroine Rynn is assisted by the dragon, Arokh, with whom she shares a soul. The introduction of a non-linear storyline and a trading system that allows abilities to be increased may set it apart from similar titles but on current form the game looks like it certainly will not win awards for visuals.

ZUSAR-VASAR

FORMAT: **DREAMCAST** DEVELOPER: **REALVISION**





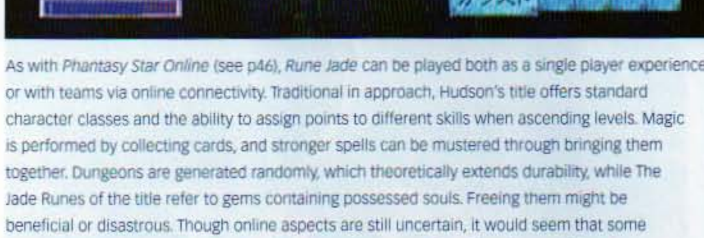




This is chariot racing with a distinct twist. The Chars (a hybrid of a chariot and a car) have a mechanical aspect and are drawn by robot animals. Anyone still unmoved by such surreal leanings might be more impressed by having the ability to race over air, sea and land. The robot animals will come in three categories and can be upgraded to produce 18 different models. Three race modes are available, including Battle and Campaign. In the former, Chars can be upgraded with superweapons such as lasers and missiles, while the latter allows players to compete over all 21 courses. A twoplayer option will also be included.

RUNE JADE

FORMAT: **DREAMCAST** DEVELOPER: **HUDSONSOFT**



As with *Phantasy Star Online* (see p46), *Rune Jade* can be played both as a single player experience or with teams via online connectivity. Traditional in approach, Hudson's title offers standard character classes and the ability to assign points to different skills when ascending levels. Magic is performed by collecting cards, and stronger spells can be mustered through bringing them together. Dungeons are generated randomly, which theoretically extends durability, while The Jade Runes of the title refer to gems containing possessed souls. Freeing them might be beneficial or disastrous. Though online aspects are still uncertain, it would seem that some dungeons and areas can be accessed only through cooperation with other participants.

NAPPLE TALE

FORMAT: **DREAMCAST** DEVELOPER: **SEGA**

The team responsible for this 2D action platformer with RPG elements is mainly composed of women, although **Edge** is reluctant to comment on the consequences of this for fear of further irritating its male readership (see Viewpoint). With a female protagonist and a plot revolving around a break between a dreamworld and reality, the game may look 3D but it retains a firm 2D play mechanic, making it reminiscent of the likes of *Pandemonium*, although Sega would no doubt cite *Clockwork Knight* as inspiration. *Napple Tale*'s most interesting aspect is the ability to edit a helper character with the possibility of 70 combinations. Just how this function adds to the gameplay will be eagerly awaited.






OCARINA OF TIME: MUJURA'S MASK

Shigeru Miyamoto's most recent 64bit masterpiece was a long time coming. Will *Mujura's Mask* offer anything more than a mere tasty snack before Dolphin *Zelda*?











Collecting masks was a whimsical side quest in *Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time*. Following the enthusiasm expressed by fans, finding masks is now an integral part of the game, enabling Link to develop special powers. Many ingenious puzzles will revolve around these transformations

Format: **N64**

Publisher: **Nintendo**

Developer: **In-house**

Release: **April (Japan)**

Origin: **Japan**

Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time has an arguably unfinished feel to it. It's irrefutable that the time-travel motif was a pale shadow of *Zelda III*'s outstanding parallel worlds theme. It's not that the idea in itself was poor, more that it was under used. With *Mujura's Mask*, Nintendo introduces a rather less ambitious – but still promising – key theme.

Nintendo is, as ever, jealously guarding the big secrets. What is certain, though, is that *Mujura's Mask* takes place in another dimension, rather than the traditional Hyrule/Sacred Realm setting. As Link arrives at the start of the game, he discovers that the world's moon is due to crash into the planet, and he has three days to sort out the problem.



New and interesting characters are introduced at various points in the game – which both help and hinder Link on his adventures



Z-lock makes a welcome return in *Mujura's Mask*, but Link will also be able to use many more different weapons as he tackles his quest

As with *Ocarina of Time*, Link can collect and wear special masks. This time, however, they have a more profound effect. If Link wears a Goron mask, he becomes a Goron, acquiring the indigenous abilities and characteristics of that species. Similarly, a Zora mask will imbue the hero with additional water-faring abilities, and a new appearance. The potential this presents for engaging puzzles is considerable – an area in which Nintendo is near peerless.

Another *Ocarina of Time* feature reintroduced and reworked for *Mujura's Mask* is the playing of musical instruments. Link is no longer restricted to piping out themes on an ocarina; he can now use a variety of instruments, depending on his form at any one time. As a Zora, he plays a guitar; as a Goron, he bangs a set of drums; as a Deku Scrub, a collection of horns... *Mujura's Mask* is certain to be packed with such asides and sub-games.

Many traditional *Zelda* elements have remained and indeed been improved upon in *Mujura's Mask* as the *Ocarina of Time* development team has remained much the same. The addition of a new display icon in screenshots is believed to represent a time gauge, but whether Link can skip between days has yet to be confirmed – but such extended freedom is not a feature too outlandish to expect of the *Zelda* team.

Link is no longer restricted to **piping out themes on an ocarina; he can now use a variety of instruments,** depending on his form at any one time





As in the first N64 *Zelda* adventure, expect a host of extra mini challenges

TOKYO HIGHWAY BATTLE 2

After a disastrous first attempt, Genki returns to the Dreamcast driving scene with a much-improved vehicle for displaying the joyriding excesses of Japanese youth









Genki has adopted the 'shiny' aesthetic already common in next-generation racing titles. Other road users, including trucks (above), look particularly solid



Despite the lack of official licences, *Highway Battle 2* will still not include damage to cars. A spirit point gauge will be used instead

Format: **Dreamcast**

Publisher: **Genki**

Developer: **In-house**

Release: **June (Japan)**

Origin: **Japan**

Driving along stretches of freeway at night with little to do except avoid sleeping at the wheel is hardly rich material for a videogame. In *Tokyo Highway Battle* (reviewed **E**75), apart from the occasional tussle with an opponent or scrape along a crash barrier, it took the realism of motorway sims to new heights by delivering one of the dullest drives in videogaming history.

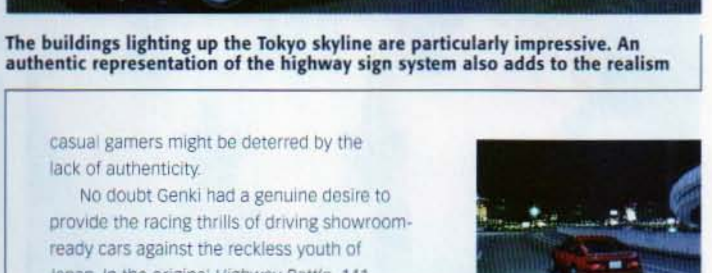
Now refreshed and eager to please, Genki returns with what is already looking like a much improved product. Early footage indicates that the graphical finnese has been enhanced by extra, subtle lighting effects.

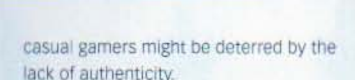
The game takes place solely at night, which has clearly allowed Genki's coders to concentrate on the contrast between the dark skies and the luminosity of street and headlights. Reflections play effectively off windscreens, while beams trace beautifully in the dark after sharp turning.

The first *Highway Battle* fell between two stools, offering neither the race-by-race thrills of a *Gran Turismo* nor the open-ended freedom of titles such as *Midtown Madness* or *Driver*. A 30km-round circuit with only three possible detours hardly reflected Tokyo's internal freeway network. With over 180km of highway stretching from the north of the city to the south Tokyo Bay and numerous junctions (Genki has even had to include an onscreen navigation device),









The buildings lighting up the Tokyo skyline are particularly impressive. An authentic representation of the highway sign system also adds to the realism



Great thought has gone into the lighting effects. Blurred streetlights add to the sense of speed while tracing is evident when swerving sharply

Highway Battle 2 appears to offer the variability that was sadly lacking from the original.

Car physics have also been overhauled. Rather than limited single-axis turning, the developer promises a more dynamic, realistic drive with responsive handling. Though 29 car models were previously available, most of them felt sluggish and heavy. In all, 60 are now on offer and with the option of upgrading with 120 individual car parts, longevity should be improved. To avoid licensing difficulties and hefty payments for construction, Genki has chosen to closely model vehicles on their real counterparts. Enthusiasts will recognise their favourites instantly, though more casual gamers might be deterred by the lack of authenticity.

No doubt Genki had a genuine desire to provide the racing thrills of driving showroom-ready cars against the reckless youth of Japan. In the original *Highway Battle*, 141 combatants were prepared to race against you. It was noticeable, however, that they merely responded like slightly quicker street vehicles. Boasting individual characteristics and racing styles (**Edge** has heard this one before), 300 opponents are now awaiting players' fierce overtaking manoeuvres.

There are six play modes to sustain enjoyment. Quest mode is the main part of the game where your goal is to become master of the road by defeating your adversaries in duels. The Quick mode operates like an arcade-style racer – both player and opponent have a spirit point gauge. These life gauges decrease depending on how you perform – hit an oncoming car and you'll lose a large chunk. Interestingly, a battle naming system has been incorporated. Driving style is monitored taking into account such factors as average speed, overtaking tactics, skids and scrapes; from this data the game will give you a personal nickname.

Limited Internet options are also available. It will be possible to go to Genki's home page using the network option and share your best times. Other players' records can also be downloaded to appear in the game. These then act as an incentive to improve your own times. Though attempted numerous times before, the opportunity of grinding a luxury vehicle through Tokyo's hectic traffic has never quite been realised. By learning from its mistakes, Genki is in a fair position to make amends.



The on-screen map is essential for navigation around Tokyo's highways





All famous Japanese GT vehicles are included, in 'disguised' form. With upgrades involving 120 parts, you can construct your own motorway beast

ELDORADO GATE

To many people RPGs are merely medieval soap operas. Now Capcom appears set to reinforce this view with an episodic swords 'n' sorcery title



The usual mixture of spells and combat are included. However, Capcom is to stay away from the random battles famously employed by SquareSoft







The visuals harken back to the 16bit era. Action RPG fans should rejoice





With an episodic bent, the opportunity to develop characters over a long period will be the key to *Eldorado Gate*'s success

Format: **Dreamcast**

Publisher: **Capcom**

Developer: **In-house**

Release: **August (Japan)**

Origin: **Japan**

Although it is not immediately apparent, *Eldorado Gate* might just be one of the most innovative games featured within this issue of **Edge**. An RPG, resolutely 16bit in appearance – if appreciably hi-res and colourful – it has distinctive character designs by former *Final Fantasy* artist Amano Tenno. This intriguing Capcom venture is no stroke of technological genius. On a conceptual level, however, it is an early realisation of a future form of videogaming, an alternative means of prescribing entertainment to the paying punter.

This summer, Capcom will begin to release the first seven chapters of *Eldorado Gate*. Sold individually and chronologically, they are due to appear once every two months, and retail at a modest ¥2,800 (£17). Thereafter, another two episodes – again, consisting of seven individual chapters – will be released, with the series due to reach its conclusion in 2004.

In terms of play mechanics, *Eldorado Gate* can best be described as comfortably familiar – it is an action RPG at heart. (Its developers are, **Edge** understands, no great fans of the indeterminably random and time-consuming battle sequences so beloved of Square and its ilk.) Each chapter takes approximately a day to complete.

Interestingly, a player's performance in one bi-monthly release can affect the direction of subsequent episodes. The onus seems to lies on completist dedication. But for financial and design reasons alike, such dedication is not mandatory. Okamoto-san, the visionary behind *Eldorado Gate*, has already completed the scripts for the first six chapters.

The seventh, final part of the first episode will only be written after he has viewed player feedback. This is not just a case of an author hedging his bets, but also a demonstration of scripting on the fly, another emerging aspect of interactive entertainment.

As an added bonus – and, no doubt, a move to appease Sega's fierce desire to offer online functionality – players will be able to download new weapons via the Internet.

Don't expect to see *Eldorado Gate* make it to UK shores in its episodic, bi-monthly form (if at all). As forward thinking as the premise behind it may be, the western marketing and retail machine is simply not up to the task of introducing it to a wide, multilingual audience at this fast a pace. Indeed, it has yet to be proven that it can succeed in Japan, a nation significantly well disposed towards RPGs and, for that matter, invention. Observing *EG*'s fortunes following launch will prove interesting.





Is this the most epic RPG to date? Put 2004 as a date in your diary

STAR WARS RACER

Relax, Jar Jar Binks is nowhere to be seen. Instead, Sega is focusing on the most exhilarating element of 'Episode One' in order to build its latest coin-op





This twisty-turny section forces you to ease off the throttle of what amounts to a seat mounted between a pair of stupidly overpowered rocket engines




The game is powered by a Hikari board, offering ramped-up Naomi technology

Format: **Coin-op**

Publisher: **Sega**

Developer: **AM R&D#5**

Release: **Summer**

Origin: **Japan**

A spring 2000 release date has been pencilled in by LucasArts for its Dreamcast conversion of *Star Wars: Episode I Racer*. Meanwhile the arcade version of the franchise has been getting an early airing, though the team behind *Sega Rally 2* isn't working on a straight translation of the title. Sega's take offers players the opportunity to climb into fourplayer cabinets shaped in a manner reminiscent of Anakin's pod, for a more immersive experience than console owners will be accustomed to.

Four tracks that are thematically similar to those of the N64 game are being refined and reworked for the arcade, with richer graphics featuring higher resolution textures and a consistent frame rate of 60fps. The fogging that was the bane of the N64 title is absent, and pop-up is nowhere to be seen. The pods themselves also benefit from a high-resolution facelift.

Another difference to previous versions is the control system, which is based on two throttle sticks. Easing off one throttle will enable the pod to take corners and, with a little bit of finesse, to perform a sort of airborne 'powerslide'. There is also a boost button that can be used three times in each race. It would be a shame if this reworked control system dispenses with the subtleties of the original console title, in favour of appearance and immediacy, but early word suggests that the uniqueness of the approach lends it appeal.

The sense of speed that will be familiar to anyone who has played the LucasArts title can only be enhanced by superlative, crisp graphics, making this a coin-op to watch.



Clearly the highlight of the otherwise hopeless movie, pod racing was an obvious choice for the arcade, where dedicated cabinets thrive

VAGRANT STORY

Final Fantasy Tactics producer Yasumi Matsuno brings his distinctive style to a hardcore RPG that, unbelievably, is heading to the UK



Phantom points assigned to weapons and armour ensure that learning from adversaries is possible







A wireframe grid springs into life when combat is initiated. This changes shape and size depending on the weapon in use

Format: **PlayStation**

Publisher: **Crave/Square**

Developer: **SquareSoft**

Release: **May**

Origin: **Japan**

RPG. Three letters which still strike fear into the hearts of many western gamers. Although the *Final Fantasy* series did much to convert many console owners who had previously been allergic to terms like 'HP recovery' and 'vorpal sword of execution +1', stats-based adventure games have largely remained the sole preserve of the PC.

It is refreshing then to receive the UK code of *Vagrant Story* (first seen in its Japanese guise in **E**75) where progress is made not by nattering to every single NPC encountered but through careful management of the protagonist's skills and itinerary. Such is *Vagrant Story*'s depth that a comprehensive ingame manual is included should the numbers and percentages become overwhelming. It is even possible to clothe individual parts of your character's body with gloves, armour, helmets, cloaks, necklaces, etc.

These elements are not merely decorative, either. Each piece of armour or weaponry contains both defensive points (DPs) and phantom points (PPs). DPs drop through damage and wear and tear while PPs increase during battle. PPs enable the weapon to actually learn from the creatures defeated. Maintaining both is vital – workshops allow for repairs to take place.





Phantasmagoric effects light up the screen when magic comes into play

Magic and break arts (special attacks) are also available. Grimoires – which contain spells – must first be discovered, then casting options are added to your battle menu. Though non-turn-based combat proves to be rather stilted at first, battles promise to become more exciting once your options increase. Defending by using the symbol buttons is even possible once experience is gained.

Problems are encountered in the shape of puzzle cubes. These are blocks of differing descriptions from standard crates to magnetic platforms. Stack magnetic blocks above one another and they begin to float; put two magnetic blocks of differing colours next to one another and they fuse together. Exploring such combinations opens up new areas in the game.

After receiving a glowing reception in Japan, it's refreshing to see a game of this stature make its way to these shores. It may be a bit late in the day for the PlayStation, but that makes publisher Crave's efforts no less significant.

VIRTUA TENNIS

As the weather threatens to take a turn for the better, Sega's in-house developers are bringing the most summery of sports to the home in super-realistic style



Many of the world's finest players are included, complete with their sponsor-heavy kits. Even Jim Courier's 'lucky' cap makes an appearance (above)







The lack of a doubles option was lamented by fans of *Virtua Tennis* in the arcade. Team tactics and cooperation should play a major role on DC





Different surfaces are offered. Ball physics change accordingly

Perhaps the only disappointment of the highly enjoyable Naomi-powered *Virtua Tennis* was the inability to play in a doubles tournament. The Dreamcast version of this firm arcade tennis favourite aims to rectify the oversight and enhance the oneplayer experience with RPG and mini-game options.

"We made a tremendous effort to make this DC version very special," remarks producer **Mie Kumagai** at AM R&D#3. "After all, the videogame is born from tennis – *Pong*. How the RPG element will translate to tennis is an intriguing prospect. Initially, the player will be able to compete to gain special prizes and tickets to tournaments around the world." Kumagai reveals that an additional set of characters will be included to compete alongside the eight of the arcade original.

The instant playability and intuitive control method which made *Virtua Tennis* such a hit in coin-op form also returns. The character is controlled by the analogue stick and two buttons (shot and lob) provide shot selection. Afterspin is possible with plenty of practice, and getting to the ball early results in a more powerful smash.

The fluid and realistic character physics have also been improved for this Dreamcast iteration. Alongside using pro-players to improve the motion capture, AM R&D#3 experimented with light sources on the characters to create the most realistic effects. Hours of video footage were studied by the developers – not only to improve the movement but also to reflect the behaviour and emotions at key points during a set. Expect McEnroe-esque tantrums from your opponent should your shot land on the chalk line.

The tension factor has also been heightened through clever use of the PuruPuru pack. Interestingly, a heartbeat rhythm is fed through the controller which increases in pitch as the excitement mounts. With talk of VMS and modem options, *Virtua Tennis* certainly looks like it could shape up to become Sega's premier 128bit sports title.



Foregoing the cute styling of many tennis titles, *Virtua Tennis* gets closer to the look and feel of the televised sport

Format: **Dreamcast**
Publisher: **Sega**
Developer: **AM R&D#3**
Release: **Summer**
Origin: **Japan**





JetSetRadio

Once perceived to be 'just another take on the rhythm action theme', Sega's new actioner has revealed itself to be one of the most tempting Dreamcast titles to date

It's been a fraught process gathering game images from *Jet Set Radio* since viewing it in rolling video form at autumn's Tokyo Game Show and getting a chance to sample it first hand at the spring event (see News, p12). Sega Europe has been cagey about releasing screenshots of what might turn out to be the most entertaining game to grace any system for a long while.

Could this be due to the anticipated controversy that its graffiti-spraying street gangs are expected to provoke? With videogames already heavily under attack from certain sections of the media (see News, p16), **Edge** awaits comments from a Stop This Copycat Graffiti Lobby.

Nevertheless, *JSR* really does look sublime. Exuding a cartoon style that will soon become a common sight in a new generation of games, its inline skaters look completely integrated into their world. The characters are navigated around a 3D world in real time – just how free the player will be able to explore this world is still uncertain, though barely indistinguishable transition between cut-scenes and ingame action augers well.

"People still think it's a music game. An action game was always uppermost in our minds. It's a unique design with great gameplay. I hope the impact will be immense"

Part of the graphical appeal is provided by cel rendering, a technique which highlights main characters and background features by delineating them with a heavy black border. The ingame camera clearly tracks the character behind and around scenery, which will be an audacious effect if the finished version manages to be intuitive and respond to the characters' swift movement.

Edge recently sat down with the team behind *JSR* in an effort to learn more about this unique project. A young bunch, they are bristling with fresh ideas.

Edge: What other titles has the *JSR* team worked on?

Kawagoe Takayuki (producer): We principally worked on *Panzer Dragoon*, the second and third episodes. Then we coded *Sega Rally 2* on Dreamcast.

Ueda Ryu (art producer): I joined for the second *Panzer Dragoon*.

Hosokawa Kazuki (designer): You all worked from the second and myself, only on *Azel*, the third.

KT: *Panzer Dragoon*, *Zwei* and *Azel* and *SR2* are our main team achievements.

Edge: Sega's design concepts are often very original. What are your sources of inspiration?

UR: Before I joined Sega, I saw how *Sonic* was greatly appreciated overseas and especially in UK videogames magazines. I loved the design of the character, which was totally new, like an underground stream in the videogame industry. It was very refreshing and I decided to join Sega. But when I came here, I was surprised and disappointed since there was only anime and manga-like designs. It was not the Sega I thought it would be. With *JSR*, I have been able to explore my own ideas about design. There is not any special Sega concept or inspiration. It is my style.

KT: Before the game took its shape, it was just a group of new ideas. Everybody came with a few of their own. We knew that technically the machine was able to run them. But we had to figure out how. The team is very young – averaging 26 or 27. It is unique inside Sega and in the videogame industry. We started with three people and we added three more.

UR: The others started out just as helpers at the beginning.

KT: As young people they brought with them new gameplay, new concepts and a brand new vision of videogames. So, yes, for a long time *JSR* was a gathering of new minds and gradually, as we put everything together, it finally took shape. I really want to stress that it is a very young team. We have been told to do what we want. And we have.

Edge: How would you describe *JSR*?

KT: It's all about inline skating. People are skating inside a city – not in order to hit someone, but to flee. A few groups of people will try to catch the skaters. Why have them fleeing? Because the skaters tag the city. This is its central premise.

Edge: How much freedom will the player have to explore the game's environment?

KT: The game world is composed of three main areas, which are Shibuya, Kabukicho – a section of East Shinjuku – and Tsukishima. There are no set routes. These districts of Tokyo are entirely made in 3D. You can move freely, but with limits. It is, after all, a game. City life is also reproduced with cars running and people walking. It all looks very real.

Edge: Can you expand on the story?

Kikuchi Masayoshi (director): There is









From top: Kikuchi Masayoshi, Ueda Ryu, Kawagoe Takayuki

a group of young inline skaters. There are also other gangs. They confront each other in Tokyo. To mark their territory, the first group tags the walls. Other groups will have different ways to mark their influence. Anyway, these markings will attract police attention. The police will then try to stop the young people or at least disturb them in their activities.
UR: The policemen will try to grab the player. If they succeed, they will drag life points from the skater. The player will have to do everything possible to get the police off their tails.
KM: We are working hard to allow the players to write graffiti in the city freely but for many reasons we cannot offer such freedom. For example, it will not be possible to paint all the way up a long road. The graffiti spots will be localised though various ways.
UR: Actually, you have a range of 100 graffiti types you can choose from.
KM: Yes, and in addition, the player will be able to make his own in a special edit mode, then use them or upload them to the *JSR* home page. Other users will then be able to download them.

Edge: Is there any particular meaning behind each type of graffiti?
KM: Well, we do not know yet if we will give any meaning to the graffiti but we are examining this idea.

Edge: What is the goal of the game?
KM: Essentially, you have to extend your territory by spraying graffiti. The rival gangs will then have to react to stop you. There will be events like the arrival of the police or a criminal organisation. But I think the story will become clearer as the game progresses.
UR: Put simply, you have to spray graffiti in several locations to clear a stage.
KM: Sometimes you will have to reach a certain amount of points to clear a stage. And bonus games can be accessed depending on the score you get.
KT: There is a very simple story in which you have to defeat a supreme evil. The police are one of the most common adversaries. Then you'll have a mid-stage boss, which is a rival team. It may be, for example, a criminal shooting at you with a gun, protected by several fearsome dogs. Then you have the true boss.

Your only way to defend yourself is by fleeing and your only weapon is graffiti. A few of the visuals will appear realistic – gunfire, missiles fired from a helicopter, the hero getting scorched by a missile explosion. The whole thing should be considered as manga in style. There is nothing serious. For example, the bad guys look very much like the gangs you could find in 'Robocop 2'!

Edge: Did you choose audio that fits the graphical style?
KT: It is difficult to find a BGM which will be accepted worldwide. There are many differences, especially in the music field. However, we are working closely with SOA and SOE on this issue. In a general sense, we will try to include as many street culture elements as possible. Music will be inspired from this idea – hip-hop, house, and so on. There will be also a DJ who will be very hip-hop looking.
UR: This DJ has a central role in the game. He will inform the player about police movements, and he will perform DJ techniques in a very stylish way. In the game each skater has a radio watch and uses it to communicate and hear the DJ via radio.



A rare moment of calm in the game. Arrows serve to deliver instructions on further progress

Edge: Did you look into making the game playable via the Internet?
Takayuki: The game has no online features except a home page. As the director explained, the player is able to design his own graffiti. So it will be possible to upload or download the designs. There will not be any ingame items available, since *JSR* will not offer such a feature. There will be an Internet ranking option, though.

Edge: How many play modes are available in the game?
KT: Basically, the game is oneplayer only, so don't expect to see twoplayer or online game modes.
UR: There will be several modes, like a time attack, a race mode and a race attack. We are working on them now.







The authorities are not especially happy about you tagging their city, which results in a number of police chases (main). Gamers into *Tony Hawk's Skateboarding* will find much to enjoy here, with grinds (top left) and plenty of air (above left)

KM: All we can say at this stage is that we are planning to include several modes in order to enjoy the game and demonstrate the full power of the machine.

Edge: Such freedom in a 3D environment requires a very clever camera system. How will this work?

KM: Yes, we particularly spent lots of time on this problem. The difficulty is that Japanese users are very sensitive compared to the Americans or the Europeans. Yes, many people in Japan suffer from motion sickness after using a *Doom* or *Quake* view system. I personally cannot play more than 30 minutes with *Quake*. So we had to have both a dynamic camera angle and fixed ones. So depending on the given action, or location, the game will use a moving camera or a fixed one.

Edge: How many characters and stages are there in the game?

KM: There will be four, if you consider the map according to the visual images. If you compare *JSR* to other standard games, there are more than ten stages in this game. There are two characters – a boy and a girl.

KT: No! There are about ten!

UR: I don't know if we can speak about it but... Okay, it is possible to make a few enemy characters join your group so the number of members will increase. You will have a central room – a garage – where you will be able to choose your character. Actually, it will be possible to customise this garage. Regarding the stages, there will be some by daylight and others by evening or night. However, the time or the weather will not change during play.

KT: We wanted to add the possibility of playing on the enemy side.

KM: Yes, but we didn't have enough time.

Edge: Are the moves different for each character? How many different moves are there, and how does the player execute them?

KT: It is very easy, using essentially one button. We want a wide range of users to enjoy our title. So you have a certain number of moves available for each skater. They change according to the character you have selected. How many of them are there for each skater?

KM: There may be 12.

KT: Really?

KM: Well, you have front and rear.

KT: Well, let's say ten, yes?

KM: I mean you have two basic techniques you can use in many ways – six when you are going forward and another six backward. The moves change if you are on a road or on a half pipe. So, you can get a maximum of 12 moves per character.

UR: Let's say ten.

KT: Yes, there are ten moves. Regarding the graffiti, you have to reproduce the command displayed on screen using the spray button and the analogue joystick. Sometimes, you will have to perform several moves in a chain to accomplish big graffiti.

Edge: What was the most difficult aspect during development?

UR: At the beginning we had to figure out how to make our ideas possible. We knew what we wanted to do but were unsure about how to implement them. So we had to conduct a great deal of research on the Dreamcast code to see just how far we could make our ideas work. For me, I had to think about how my design could adapt to a 3D world and an an action game. I had to do much research and experimentation.

KT: What about you, Hosokawa?

HK: Well...

KM: Hey, don't say nothing was impossible for you...

HK: Well, no. In fact, there is this chair of mine. It is too relaxing so I had a very hard time keeping awake.

KT: Seriously, the challenges were quite varied. We had to explore the hardware to its limits. Nobody has ever done anything like this on Dreamcast. We tried to push it to the limits.

UR: Yes. We studied, for example, the PowerVR2 closely and we have been able to make things that are impossible on a PlayStation2! For example, the textures are very colourful and detailed. The PS2 would not be able to handle them because of its weaker memory. Another example: we exploited one very interesting aspect of PowerVR2, the modifier volume, managing the shadows in a very realistic way and in real time. The game runs at 30fps and is able to display 16 characters without any lag in performance. There is also a very high number of polygons. We reinforced this aspect by using several techniques to make this polygon number greater.

KT: The 3D world is complex. You can



Photography: [illegible]

Designer Hosokawa Kazuki demonstrates *JSR*'s unique visuals

> "Japanese users can be very sensitive. They suffer from motion sickness after using a *Doom* or *Quake* system. So we had to have dynamic and fixed camera angles"



Two characters are initially available, although there's an opportunity to take control of rival gang members. Behavioural differences will be only marginal





The game's visuals mark the beginning of a new trend, which Sega is dubbing 'cel shading'. Infogrames' *Wacky Races* uses a similar method

skate in the underground, for example – in the subway or the sewer. But you can also go inside buildings and climb on to the roof. You can also jump from one roof to another. Within the limits of the area, which is already quite wide, you can go everywhere with a high level of freedom.
UR: You may sometimes even be able to break walls.

Edge: How do you think Japanese gamers will respond to *JSR*?

KT: We have not released much information about the game in Japan. *JSR* first appeared in the autumn at the Tokyo Game Show. At that time, we showed a short 30-second video, only twice during the entire three days of the show. Then we put another short video in Dreamcast Partners demo GD-ROM. We even added a short text to give an idea about the game. But we kept details to a minimum so that people still thought it was a 2D game. The first true introduction was at TGS 2000.
UR: Many people still think it is a music game. Though from the beginning an action game was always uppermost in our minds. Since we made a unique design with great gameplay, I really hope the impact will be immense.
KT: Yes, I really think we have a chance to make a major impact. We worked hard to deliver a totally new trend and feeling to a Dreamcast title. TGS was the first time we had shown a playable demo or even a real video of the game.

Edge: Will the overseas versions be different? If so, in what way?

KT: Essentially, there will be one additional map. It will come before the four Tokyo areas. This new map will certainly have a US taste. I just came back from the US where I visited New York and San Francisco. I don't think we will recreate either of those cities, since they don't offer enough spots for inline skating. So, designing this additional stage will be our focus after releasing the Japanese version, which is scheduled for August.
UR: Why not use the *Crazy Taxi* city?
KT: Yeah, good idea! It is not easy to find a city with many spots to skate and spray graffiti.

Edge: What about the spray paint you can collect in each stage?

UR: They're not items. They represent the spirits of the city. Common people cannot see them. Only skaters can. The sprays provide life points and paint. It is like *Sonic* or *Mario* where you collect coins.

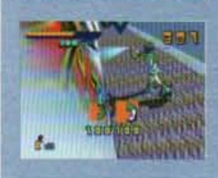
Edge: As a relatively young team, you've clearly played lots of videogames. But *Jet Set Radio* seems to represent a new genre, chiefly because of the way it looks. Are there any other games that you look at and think you'd like to have been responsible for making them?

KM: That's a difficult question to answer. A game you like very much is quite different from the experience of having worked on one. A game is more about its developer's ideas. So, for me, it is still another person's ideas that count.
UR: We are in a position to turn our dreams into reality. But having said that, we all still love *Zelda* on N64.

Designer tag

Jet Set Radio's tags are set to become cult items. It's currently unclear how gamers will be able to design their own patches of graffiti, but the VMS compatibility ensures that they'll be shared all over.







Rather than simply passing checkpoints, the ability to tag becomes an integral element of the game. Several areas must be tagged before the level is finished

Yuji Naka

Head to head with Sega's *überproducer*

With two wildly different Dreamcast titles in the offing, Sonic's father is exploring new avenues. Edge met him at Sega's HQ to discover how shakeable percussion instruments figure in his plans

As the creative force behind *Sonic the Hedgehog*, **Yuji Naka** is no stranger to developing surreal worlds inhabited by curious creatures. His two current projects, *Phantasy Star Online* and the strange, hypnotic *Samba de Amigo*, are proof if any were needed that after 15 years at Sega his creative powers are still in abundance.

It is clear that Naka-san is keen to plant a flag with *Phantasy Star Online*. After touching on the Internet capabilities of the Dreamcast with *Sonic Adventure*, *PSO* is going one further and shaping into the first online RPG experience in Japan's home videogame history.

"I made the first two episodes of the series which were traditional RPGs," Naka-san tells **Edge**. "I wanted the new *Phantasy Star Online* to embrace a whole new experience. This game is the most obvious way. It offers totally new perspectives as the player is completely immersed inside the game."

Though *PSO* offers a oneplayer offline game, many features can only be accessed through close cooperation with online companions. "Teamwork is going to be my main concern for this title," continues Naka-san. "It will be possible to clear the main quest of the game alone but that would only account for a small percentage of my whole vision."

The world is enough

The game world has been kept compact to prevent endless wandering for little reward. "I don't really like titles like *Final Fantasy* or *Dragon Quest*. You have a very long story and it is necessary to travel miles and miles, sometimes getting lost on the map. I prefer the player to be focused



"I don't really like titles like *Final Fantasy* or *Dragon Quest*. You have a very long story and it is necessary to travel miles and miles, sometimes getting lost on the map"



on the gameplay as well as the story," says Naka-san. "Plus, since it is an online title, people cannot spend as much time as they would on a standard RPG."

Based in the original Mega Drive *Phantasy Star* world, Naka-san is eager for the game to retain some familiar elements. "There is a main quest where a huge disaster has happened. A kind of gigantic meteor has crashed on the planet surface and caused a great deal of destruction. The goal will be to find out why this has happened."

"Each player will have strong and weak areas and it will be essential for the group to know each other inside out. Otherwise the party will be quickly wiped out"

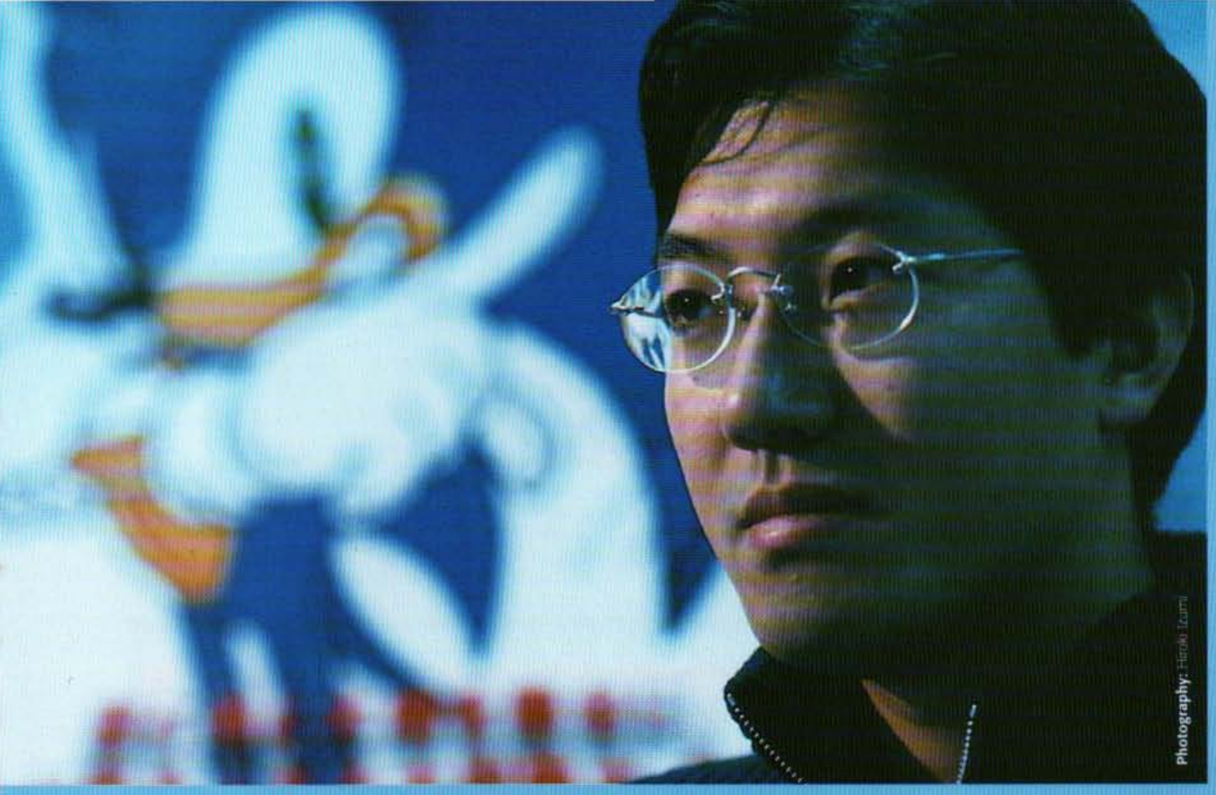
The game supports four players in the game world – a number which the Sega producer admits is low compared to PC online worlds. "I don't want the game to be a huge battlefield," he explains. "Fighting is not the main priority. Exploration and adventure counts the most." He believes that, technically, the Dreamcast might struggle to maintain many characters interacting on the same screen in real time. An effort has been made to keep the game running at a smooth 30fps to maintain the quality of gameplay and interaction.

"The action is viewed from behind the characters and the players will have to pull together to solve puzzles and defeat enemies," he reveals. "A simple example of this would be a mechanism with four switches which need to be operated at the same time. One or even three players alone would not be able to access this part of the game." Naka-san is clearly revelling in the multiplay issues and conundrums which his game will occasionally present. "It is the most fun aspect of the world," he exclaims. "Imagine the four players are in a dungeon and after some gruelling battles you are rewarded with a chest. Inside the chest is a cool item. It will be interesting to see how the four players decide who has earned it the most. They may fix rules, give priority to the females, or just argue."

Teamwork will be crucial when enemies are encountered. The battle system demands strong cooperation to overcome multiple enemies: "Players must choose their classes carefully. The game is based on a science-fiction world. You can play a futuristic soldier armed with a laser weapon, or be a magician. Each player will have strong and weak areas and it will be essential for the group to know each other inside out. Otherwise the party will be quickly wiped out."

One of the major sticking points with online worlds has been bullying between veteran characters and naive first timers. The former are happy to gain experience by killing anyone wearing no more than a tunic, whereas the latter are unable to afford to buy a pint of ale at the local tavern never mind a double-edged broadsword. Naka-san believes he has resolved this difficulty by preventing player characters from injuring each other. Also, the power of the creatures alters according to the level of the players before them: when there are two characters and one is stronger than the other the game will adapt the enemy to the level of the weakest. This potentially allows the new player to narrow the difference in levels.

Of course, this will not prevent some



Naka-san is particularly focused on creating a workable communication system. In one mode, typed dialogue will appear in speech bubbles (below)





group skulduggery should the players fall out. When a player is dead it is up to the others to decide what to do – they can be kind and restore his life with a potion, or take him to a town and ask a magician to resurrect him. Alternatively they can be callous and ransack the body of all the items he was equipped with.

It's good to talk

Not only will the characters be able to communicate through onscreen interaction but also through a talk interface. A great deal of thought has gone into the way players will communicate online. Because Naka-san wants the game to be truly global, three methods are being considered: "The first is a common chat using the keyboard or the controller – the message appears in a bubble above the character. The second one is based on a set of keywords – when a player from one country uses one of them it is automatically translated. I'm thinking about five of the most used languages in the world in addition to Japanese. Then there is the third one, which will be based on icons. They will be very easy to understand and will allow basic communication."







Combat exudes a feel that will be familiar to fans of the series. The entire game has been built upon proven values, in fact, which should appease hardcore Sega gamers. The magnificent visuals are icing on the cake

Phantasy Star Online

Format: Dreamcast Publisher: Sega Developer: In-house Release: Summer Origin: Japan



Below: "Okay, who pulled the plug out?"









Amigo's Naomi-board origins have led to an easy conversion process, the DC version retaining all the vibrancy of the coin-op. The game's specialist hardware has proved more difficult to bring over

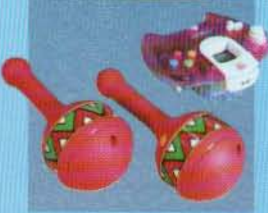
Samba de Amigo

Format: **Dreamcast** Publisher: **Sega** Developer: **In-house** Release: **Summer** Origin: **Japan**

Shake, rattle & control

Initial R&D estimates put the cost of maraca controllers at ¥50,000 (£300); after much tinkering costs came down to ¥7,800 (£47). Similar devices may be used for baseball sims in the future.





Rhythm action

On the surface, Naka-san's other project, *Samba de Amigo*, is a strikingly different project than *PSO*. But he maintains that they both set out to reinforce friendships. Sonic Team's maraca-waving music title even has a Love Love mode, described as perfect for a date as it will evaluate the harmony between two people. The concept is revolutionary, relying on two maracas fitted out with motion sensors. Naka-san tells **Edge** that he got the idea in a moment of boredom while tapping on his desk with a pen. "I knew then that I wanted a game based on tempo," he remembers. "When the idea of maracas came to me I went straight to see the technology R&D department. I was told it would be possible with a budget of ¥50,000 or more for the controllers. This was not suitable for mass-market users so we developed the coin-op instead."

Naka-san stuck solidly to the idea of a console *Amigo* and eventually convinced the R&D staff that the peripherals could work with other games. "It is the first time sensors are to be used in a home videogame and at such a low price. This system offers brand new possibilities. Imagine a baseball title, a boxing game or even a game like *Phantasy Star Online*. You could use a sword controller!"

Sensing motion

The Dreamcast version even brings more innovation, to take full advantage of *Amigo*'s party spirit. The motion-sensitive cells on either side of the coin-op screen have been moved to a rail on the floor. This seems the best solution to Naka-san and solves any potential problems from differing TV models: "There is also a carpet attached to the rail for the players to stand on. It's not vital to use this but there are marks informing the player where to stand. Plus, it's a cool design."

As well as the Dreamcast's arcade mode there is a challenge option. Complete all your maraca assignments and you can become King of the Fiesta. Party mode explores many twoplayer possibilities. The Battle mission pits one player against another to perform combos. Points are awarded to the most rhythmically skilled. And an Internet option will be available for those with ambition to become international superstars. As well as the download of completely new tunes, mini-games can be accessed to rank players at national and international levels.

All the noises coming from Sega remain positive – despite the successful launch of PlayStation2. Although software of the quality of *Crazy Taxi* and *Soul Calibur* have done much to strengthen Sega's image, **Edge** is still awaiting a killer title with the depth and longevity that *Online* promises. When asked about the Dreamcast's progress so far, Naka-san remains bullish about its popularity and future prospects. "I was very surprised by Dreamcast's success, especially in the US," he admits. "The machine now needs some great titles to sustain its growth. The PS2 is a great release as hardware but as a game system it is not that good. This gives us the edge. A good line-up will be the focus again. Now we have all the servers in place the DC may at last deliver its full potential thanks to the coming online titles and services."

In the online battle, Naka believes Sega has a healthy head start: "SCEI has to start from scratch. Its 2001 deadline could appear optimistic. So in this field we still have a lead. We just have to use it wisely."



Ferrari 360 Ch

Format: **PlayStation2**

Publisher: **Acclaim**

Developer: **Brain in a Jar**

Release: **Spring 2001**

Origin: **UK**



allenge

The world's most prestigious sports car manufacturer. A fiercely contested international one-make, one-model race series. A three-man team committed to taking PlayStation2 to the limit. Strap yourself in...

Not unlike a sports car's suspension, **Edge**'s planned visit to *Ferrari 360 Challenge* developer Brain in a Jar isn't running very smoothly. Passengers on the King's Cross to Chester Virgin train have spent the last 30 minutes with little choice but to admire the northern end of Tamworth station's platform. It's not the most inspiring sight. Eventually, the conductor announces the locomotive has blown up and attempts to get it restarted have been abandoned. The shock of actually running on time until now has presumably taken its toll. A fully functioning unit is apparently on its way from Manchester, but it will take an hour to get here. As it turns out, this estimate is only half right. By the time Tamworth is again a distant spot on the horizon, some 120 minutes have passed, and the only entertainment in that time has arrived in the form of one of the conductor's (numerous) announcements aptly terming the service a "complete failure."

Still, this leaves time to catch up on background information before focusing on the game, which, as its title subtly suggests, is based on Ferrari's Challenge series. This one-make, one-model international championship started in 1993 for customers seeking to race their Ferrari 348 sports cars against fellow enthusiasts. The arrival of the sublime F355 two years later instigated a 355 Challenge before being immortalised by Yu Suzuki in the masterful coin-op of the same name.

The F355's successor, the Ferrari 360 Modena, made its debut at last year's Geneva Motor Show. To many, it represents the most beautiful Ferrari ever made, boasting some of the most graceful automotive lines seen in over 100 years of car manufacture. It's a sublime 21st century package comprising a 400bhp, 3.6 litre, 40-valve, 8-cylinder engine encased within an aluminium chassis (a first for a Ferrari road car) which is itself enveloped by Pininfarina's magical touch. Ask it nicely and it'll reach 100km/h in 4.5 seconds and will continue past the 295km/h mark should you ignore the brake pedal. Curiously, the Challenge version of the 360 Modena doesn't tinker with the engine, instead trimming 120 kilos off the Modena's 1290Kg and adding competition Brembo brakes, BBS wheel rims fitted with P Zero slick Pirellis, a racing seat and six-point harness as well as the obligatory roll cage and automatic fire extinguisher. In racing trim the 360 Challenge stands 3cm closer to the track and shaves half a second off the Modena's 0-100kp/h time. A class act, then.

So you can imagine how news of a game based solely on the Ferrari 360 Challenge series was received in the **Edge** office. Nothing, not even exhausted engines and five-hour train journeys, could dampen enthusiasm. Optimism remained high once the game's developer, Brain in a Jar, began to demonstrate their work.

The three members of the codeshop (managing director **Matthew Gabriel**, art director **Carl Dalton** and technical director **Oli Wright**) are no strangers to quality. Other than their competent work on Psygnosis'



■ Matthew Gabriel
■ managing director



■ Carl Dalton
■ art director





frustratingly overlooked *Lander*, **Edge** a year ago had the chance to play a demo the trio had put together which featured a 360 Modena-esque on a simplistic track. Even in such primitive form the software showed massive promise, displaying the sort of playable handling characteristics most finished racing products fail to deliver. Acclaim saw the demo, too, and before anyone else did the deal was signed.

Building a virtual Ferrari

A year on, things have evolved massively. In the demo room at Brain in a Jar's Chester offices, *Ferrari 360 Challenge* is already running on the team's AMD computers (PS2 dev kits should have arrived by the time you read this). It's an impressive sight. Already, the prospect of seeing the finished product in another 12 months, once the team increases and implements all of the game's aspects, is thrilling. But for now, your correspondent grabs the wheel for a mid-development appraisal. The feel is absolutely excellent. Throw the 360 Challenge into a corner and the car reacts exactly as you would expect it to. Within minutes, the car is powersliding around the track's more open corners before the inevitable bout of over confidence sets in and a fraction of a second later the 360 Challenge is facing the wrong way on the track, having hit a trackside advertising hoarding before coming to a standstill – the predictable result of feeding 400bhp through the rear axle in a stupidly abrupt fashion.

Though still far from finalised, the game already delivers the kind of realism/playability equation that so easily divides this genre's leaders from its backmarkers. Some 20 laps later, the way the car wends its way around the track, the way it sets itself up for bends and how it behaves mid-corner still inspires. In a driving game, there's no better reward.

"I've a worked a lot on the car model and on the friction model for the tyre against the ground – how the four wheels work together," reveals Wright, who was responsible for *Lander*'s impressive physics model. "The code for all the wheels is the same regardless of whether it's a driven wheel or not, so there's no hacks in there – it's trying to behave like a real car. We start off and make it as realistic as possible and then start changing the physics to make it more playable."

At this stage, there's only one car on the track but another seven will join it in time for release. Like all racing game developers, Brain in a Jar promises the CPU opponents will be exemplary and to do so it has embarked on an experimental quest to introduce A-Life elements into a racing game. Specifically, it's using genetic algorithms. Think of a gene pool full of genomes. The team starts with a random set of genomes that approximate a random driver's characteristics. Initially, the CPU driver has no idea of what it's doing. It's simply using a set of variables, although it has no idea of their function – it can alter the throttle and brake, but it's more than likely to hit a wall and do nothing.



■ Oli Wright
■ technical director

Photography: Martin Thompson

Ferrari jackets: www.f1andmore.com







Although these are work-in-progress shots (elements such as track background detail are still at an embryonic stage) aspects such as smoke effects and lighting routines are already effectively in place. The time of day will change in real time throughout races, and skill-testing night events are planned

"We typically take 20 or 30 mutations from there – just slight changes from what the first one was and we let them have a go on the track," explains Wright. "We put them on the start line, give them a minute of track time and see how well they do. They don't know what they're meant to be doing – they'll either hit the wall, hit reverse and go storming down the track, or do nothing – a lot of them do nothing. But whichever does best, whichever one happens to get the furthest down the track, we pull him out and make him the parent of the next generation. So it's survival of the fittest. After a couple of hundred generations we start to see them going round the track."

And with this, Wright starts a new selection process for demonstration purposes while he elaborates on the in-game implications. "There's negative selection for crashing or going off on the grass. A score is calculated – they get points for how far down the track they get and points taken away for time spent on the grass or hitting the wall," he says. "But I can change the selection process so we can get different driver characteristics, so that if I score them on how slidy they are, for example, it will encourage drivers that kind of get the back end out a bit. So we should be able to get different driver personalities."

While he speaks, Wright's AMD Athlon has had the chance to run through a few generations (each takes a minute of CPU calculation). The object of the selection sequence in this case concentrated on steering, and already improvements are evident, with some cars making it past the first corner and setting themselves up for the second bend, getting progressively further with each generation. This is just five minutes' work, of course. The team members have got into the habit of setting the selection procedure at night before returning to it in the morning and checking out the results.

"The best one we have so far is lapping about eight seconds a lap off what we can do, but we've got a lot more to go," says Wright. "But it's fantastic to see it work when it actually produces a guy who appears to be taking the racing line around the track."

Having witnessed it in action, it's difficult to disagree.

Owning the dream

But given the current standard of the market, a racing game either packs its boot full of distinguishing features or face eternal existence as yet another non-finisher of the fiercely contested videogaming grand prix. Ferrari licence or no Ferrari licence.

Precisely because of that licence, however, *360 Challenge* is to add new elements to the usual mix. Understandably, with the proposed release date still some way off, the team is reluctant to give too much away. "There'll be a lot about the feeling of ownership," promises Gabriel. "Buying the car, what it means to actually own a Ferrari or to drive a Ferrari, the history of Ferrari – all those things will be included in it. It won't just be a racing game with real technology. That's where it's got to start from; we need to capture all of the passion."

The game plan is to include three play modes. First, an arcade option sees all of the front-end visuals and in-game screens altered to evoke a genuine coin-op feel. "Then there will be two full on seasons for the 360 Challenge version," divulges Dalton. "There will be an exhibition mode which will be the 360 Challenge car but will probably have more realistic handling than the arcade version, and there won't be anything like damage – if the licence permits us to do damage. It won't involve stuff like tyres, fuel and pit stops, and they'll be shorter races." Current Brain in a Jar convention indicates this first championship could follow a knockout structure. "We want to do stuff like having car numbers on the cars," continues Dalton, "so that you just get a number when you first start the game and if you race through exhibition mode and you get a third of the way through the championship before you get knocked out, the next time you go back into the game you get a new number that represents how far you got.

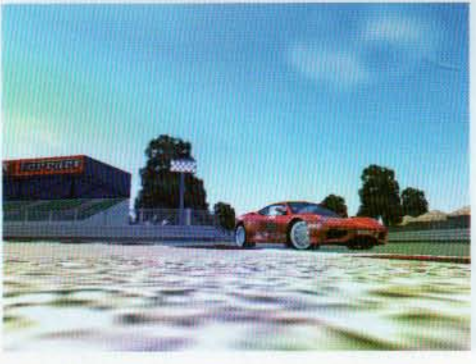
"And then there will be a separate, full-on 360 Challenge mode which will be able to have tyre wear, the most realistic handling, and the damage and prize money, and you'll have to pay for the upkeep of the car and stuff like that. But it's still very open at the moment and as we get more people on board for the team we'll be taking on as many ideas as we possibly can."

The idea of damage isn't new, of course, but it is one that is sadly missing from the majority of recent racing games. Manufacturers usually adopt the erroneous stance that allowing their licensed products to suffer virtual visual damage somehow reflects negatively on the actual quality of the real-life article, failing to realise the irony that

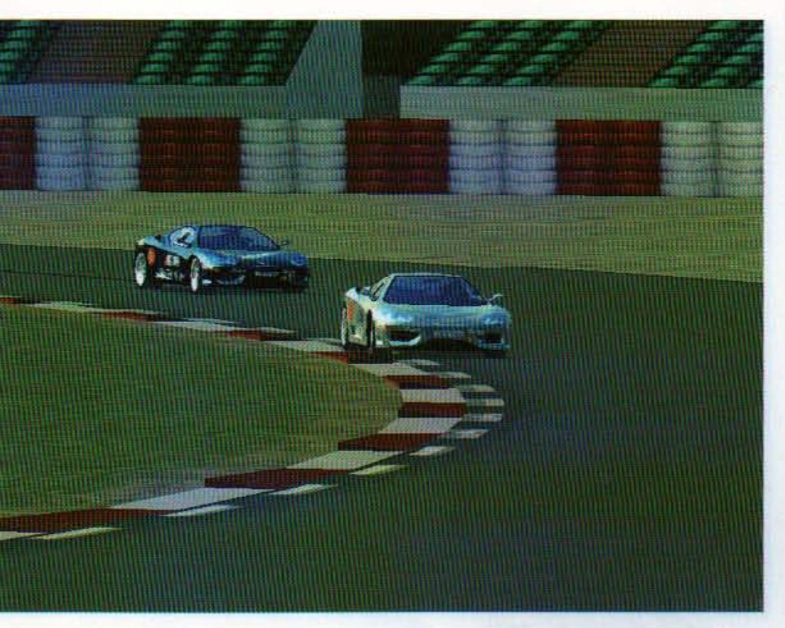








The shortest track currently runs for a length of 2.5km, the longest 4.2km. All feature several types of kerbs (constructed of polygons, naturally)









A twoplayer mode is planned (fourplayer action is a possibility), as is an improvement in the cars' aesthetics (each currently uses 1,500 polygons)

when free from punishment most players drive like demented joyriders, hitting everyone and everything in sight. In *Ferrari 360 Challenge*, the developer's suggestion of in-game damage promotes clean racing. "We really want to get this sense of when you're driving it you don't want to crash the car because it's your car," explains Wright. "When you go round the corner you don't want to use the other guy to help yourself round it because you're going to scratch the paintwork and you don't want to do that because it's your Ferrari." If you do, you'll have to pay for it. And from the moment car maintenance is financed by your virtual winnings, you'll often see uncharacteristically sportsman-like conduct from even the most notorious of cheats.

Of course, in-game damage has numerous other positive gameplay implications, and it's no exaggeration to say that *Ferrari 360 Challenge* would lose a sizeable chunk of its potential without it. Here's hoping Ferrari agrees.

All around the world

At this stage, none of the car's 1,500 polygons are disturbed by impact. "But it's not as efficient as it could be," admits Dalton. "I mean there are a lot of places where I could probably get rid of polygons and I could use them better somewhere else." The finished models are naturally expected to sport more triangles once Brain in a Jar gets to grips with Sony's 128bit architecture. Improved, too, will be the circuits. Of the seven planned, each offering various configurations, only Ferrari's test track is modelled from the real thing. The other six – in Germany, UK, Switzerland, Japan, Hawaii and the US – are inspired from features associated with national settings and offer a welcome mix of speed and technique. Dalton elaborates: "The USA track is going to be based on a left-handed oval and then a right-handed international section. The German track is long, fast, not particularly technical. The UK track has been designed as quite a technical track so it will have dips and crests and quite tight chicanes, and we want the Swiss track to be an alpine circuit, so it's got lots of crests and dips and also a road section that will do switchbacks to come back up to the track."

While most of the game's circuits are reality locked, Brain in a Jar is keen to include one or two more fun-based examples. "The Japanese track will be a city circuit so they'll be around a city centre with lots of right-hand corners and straights – with neon and stuff like that – and probably a longer section that will run up into the hills and come back round again," continues Dalton. "That section will be a dual carriageway and you'll be able to see the cars coming past the other way." Expect the Hawaiian equivalent to include American-style banked corners, and don't be surprised if they happen to wrap around the base of a volcano.

Having put in significant mileage on the team's product throughout the day, **Edge** leaves in an unusually jubilant mood. Here is a racer that promises to deliver a technically stirring, wisely structured and utterly playable experience. Importantly, it looks set to do the Ferrari licence justice. "We are very passionate about this," reaffirms Gabriel. "Obviously we believe that we've got the ability and the technology to create this but this is a huge opportunity for us, to be given the responsibility of 360 Challenge."

Given the evidence, your correspondent is convinced and leaves Chester with the reassuring feeling that the Ferrari 360 Challenge licence is in firmly reliable hands. Which is sadly more that can be said about the train journey home.















Some of the Ferrari passion is already unmistakably present: sliding the tail out in one of Maranello's finest around the team's test track is one of the most rewarding virtual racing experiences Edge has witnessed. The car handles beautifully, offering the realism/playability balance so many racers lack

Photography: Nick Wilson



rod cousens

It's taken two years and involved having Acclaim's offices painted red. Little has stood in the company's way when obtaining the Ferrari licence. While the ink on the deal dried, Acclaim's CEO (and Ferrari Owner's Club member) unveiled more

Acclaim has landed itself the most important licence in the racing genre. The passion with which Italy's Ferraristas – the famed Tiffosi – and car lovers alike treat Ferrari is unequalled within the motor industry. It transcends language, international borders, race and, to a certain extent, reason itself. **Rod Cousens**, Acclaim's CEO, is neck deep in that passion. This deal has been one of his life ambitions. And now it's his.

Edge: How would you describe the effect of the Ferrari licence on Acclaim?

Rod Cousens: If you look at the market in terms of where software is sold, you can look at two categories: sports and racing. I would say that Ferrari is the most significant brand in the racing category so I believe it becomes the backbone of our product portfolio going forward as Acclaim, and I expect to take a significant percentage of that racing category with the strongest global brand there is. Not only is it the strength of the brand in terms of just the car mark. Strength of the brand in terms of passion and emotion has no equal. So that's what I think it means to us. I think it is the brand to get and we have got it.

Edge: There are a lot of Formula One games out there at the moment – what sort of direction is Acclaim's going to take?

RC: For a start, it's Ferrari. We're not focusing on any of the other constructors that feature out there. We haven't got those rights, and nor do we seek those rights. Name another one in F1 that has the presence, that captures it all – there is only one Ferrari. We're not going to be a 'me too' product. It's not going to be a simulation, it's going to be fun, probably arcade, and it's going to be very focused on Ferrari.

Edge: No one's ever offered the kind of complete Ferrari package you're talking about. How has the manufacturer reacted?

RC: I think they've acted very positively. They're now taking a far broader perspective of the games business to see where it takes them and what it means. If you look at racing, particularly this season, you've had people like Compaq and Yahoo coming into F1 as cigarette sponsorship moves out of the category. I think they're far more attentive to it.

But I don't believe that secured the deal; I believe it was the passion that we showed. We decorated this office red, so when we'd gone down and made our pitch to Ferrari and told them what jolly fine chaps we are and why they should be working with us, we wanted to get them into this building, and when they came here we had Ferrari memorabilia everywhere. When they walked in we had the flags, we had the wheels, we had the product to show them, and we showed them commitment. We are committed to the brand and I'm personally committed to this brand. So we wanted to demonstrate that it is in safe hands and that we are going to do a hell of a job with it.

Edge: Looking ahead, you've got an F1 game, you've got a 360 Challenge game...

RC: Well, it's not going to stay there. One of the things that is much rumoured that I can tell you about now – we weren't going to talk about it until E3 – is the sales and distribution of the Sega F355 game on DC and we will be doing that. We will be releasing that product around September this year. Imagine a scenario where we're going to come out with *F355 Challenge*, we're going to follow it with *360 Challenge* and then *F1*. And Ferrari wins the constructor championship this year. I mean, that's pretty sexy.

The Sega connection

Edge: How does the deal with Sega work?

RC: You have to remember that *F355 Challenge* is a Sega product; Acclaim has not written this product. We'll be selling marketing and distributing that product around the world, rather than Sega themselves doing it, and that's because we are committed to Ferrari. And look at the line-up – we've announced that we're shipping *DOA2*, we're following it up with *F355 Challenge* on the DC and I think both of those products will be as big, if not bigger than, say *Soul Calibur*, which has been the biggest to date. And then you go into a whole next generation situation where you're going to have *360 Challenge* out there on the PS2, on Dolphin, on X-Box and on GBA. You're going to have *F1* in exactly the same way.

Edge: What do you think of *F355 Challenge*?

RC: I know Yu Suzuki. You look at him and he's one of the legends of our industry in terms of what he's produced and his whole group has produced, and this is a guy who has been captivated by Ferrari and wanted to produce something that reflected that. And I think that *F355 Challenge* is great. We had to beat that. Now, I know that came out of a coin-op with four Naomi boards, but we weren't going to sell it short. We targeted the next-generation systems with this and the standard's been set. That's what we felt. You have to do it. When we started getting together [Acclaim and Brain in a Jar], the belief in it was just that – and you knew. That's the only way I can describe it, that you knew. And you knew it was right, and we had to work together. We absolutely knew. That's why I'm excited about this whole project, more than I have been about many things in recent years. I love discovering new talent, I love discovering new product.

Probing the brain

Edge: So what's the relationship between Brain in a Jar and Acclaim?

RC: I believe in what [Matthew Gabriel] is doing. I believe in his people doing the assembling. It's finding talent, it's putting them together in one place, it's giving them the resources to succeed. So part of our role is to place in their hands a huge responsibility, which is producing the finest product – *360 Challenge* – so we're giving them the brand; I don't know many brands in the world other than Coca-Cola that have that awareness. We rate these guys enormously and we figure that what they have in terms in technology, married to the brand Ferrari, is a very powerful weapon. We basically want them to build a great development studio and produce a great game for us. I'm entirely confident in him and his people, as I think he is with us. We're trying to do everything we can. We're going to put music into this game, and it isn't run-of-the-mill music. We will get rock stars who are passionate about Ferrari, who own Ferraris, writing music for this game.

Edge: Er... not Chris Rea, surely?

RC: You've got lots of them, so you've got the quality all the way through. And these guys, why do they want to do it? Because it's Ferrari.

Edge: It's fair to say there was some apprehension in the Edge office prior to the Brain in a Jar visit. There was a fear that this might be yet another missed opportunity.

RC: And you'd have thought that we'd sold out if we hadn't done it. But I can tell you no one [at Acclaim] wants to walk back into Maranello [Ferrari's HQ] and feel they've let them down. I've driven the car and also been round their track and it's a real buzz. You can't explain it. You get on their test tracks and when they take you round with their test drivers you never cease to be amazed. You wonder how they do that and it's that same kind of feeling. I don't want to walk into that building feeling that they've got a product which doesn't live up to the name. I want to walk into that building and walk tall and know they've got something that they're proud of and that we'll do the next one.

Edge: How much of that Ferrari passion will you inject into the games?

RC: For Ferrari, it's accessing young kids who've got dreams to have a Ferrari and this is going to simply confirm to them that as they grow up and as they get behind cars this is something that they want to own. This is the ultimate car to own. You can talk about technology and reliability in other cars, but there is nothing like a Ferrari, and so we want to get that out to them. This is the nearest some of those kids will get to their dream. When

you walk into Maranello and you have the guided tour you almost do so with reverence. I was there when they had something like the 50th anniversary and they brought lots of the old great Ferrari cars back – those that were owned by Ingrid Bergman and so forth. But that's what it creates, and that's what we're going to carry on. It's just another extension of it.

We'll also work with the Ferrari partners, some of their sponsors, some of their longtime merchandising partners such as Shell, and maybe there's more we can do on that. We'll come up with clothes or Shell promotions and things like this. So we're trying to take it out as far as possible. I'd like this game to sell more over a period of time than *FIFA* has done for EA.

Edge: It must be Acclaim's biggest deal.

RC: It should be. It was a two-year investment. I paid homage to Ferrari, I embarked on my pilgrimage to Maranello and I never gave up. When we first started the process they weren't particularly interested in computer and video games. They may have been interested in the cheque book that they needed but there was certainly no sense of urgency. It took persistence and commitment and demonstrating passion to them. But we never gave up. It was also a personal ambition of mine. This was a licence too far in many ways; this was not a normal deal. I was not going to let go of this one. I didn't take no for an answer and because of that it's gone beyond a typical licensing deal. I have a close relationship with these people and I think that the one thing they're convinced of is the personal commitment to the brand and I think that meant a lot.

Edge: On a personal level it has to be the most exciting thing you've ever done.

RC: Yeah, I've never stopped being excited about this industry. I love it. I never wake up in the morning and think 'Oh, Christ'. When you run public companies you come into contact with these people – I come across bankers, accountants and lawyers – and I tend to stand in lifts with these guys and when I look around me I notice that they're in a uniform and they breed around me. Well, I've never felt like that about the games industry. I love the games industry and it continues to excite me. But this one was the crusade – the one where Cousens gets the calling and off he goes to see if I could make it happen.

The Italian job

Edge: What was the hardest aspect of the deal, other than convincing Ferrari?

RC: I'd say the hardest was making sure Ferrari was well informed about the games industry, educating its people about the games industry. They were aware of computer games and operating that aspect in Italy, but Italy isn't the biggest market in the world and has also been a highly fragmented market, posing many difficulties to hardware vendors. Over the years, you've had Nintendo change distribution many times, Sega has changed distribution many times, while Sony routed through conventional Sony music and video distribution channels to start with.

So not only did we talk about the scale of the industry and who you could reach out to, we then made them aware of the technology that was available today. The early stages were very cosmetic. As we became more comfortable with each other, it was "Show me more!" So we became aware of the 360 Challenge at a fairly early stage and then we were shown into confidential areas that are shrouded in secrecy at Ferrari.

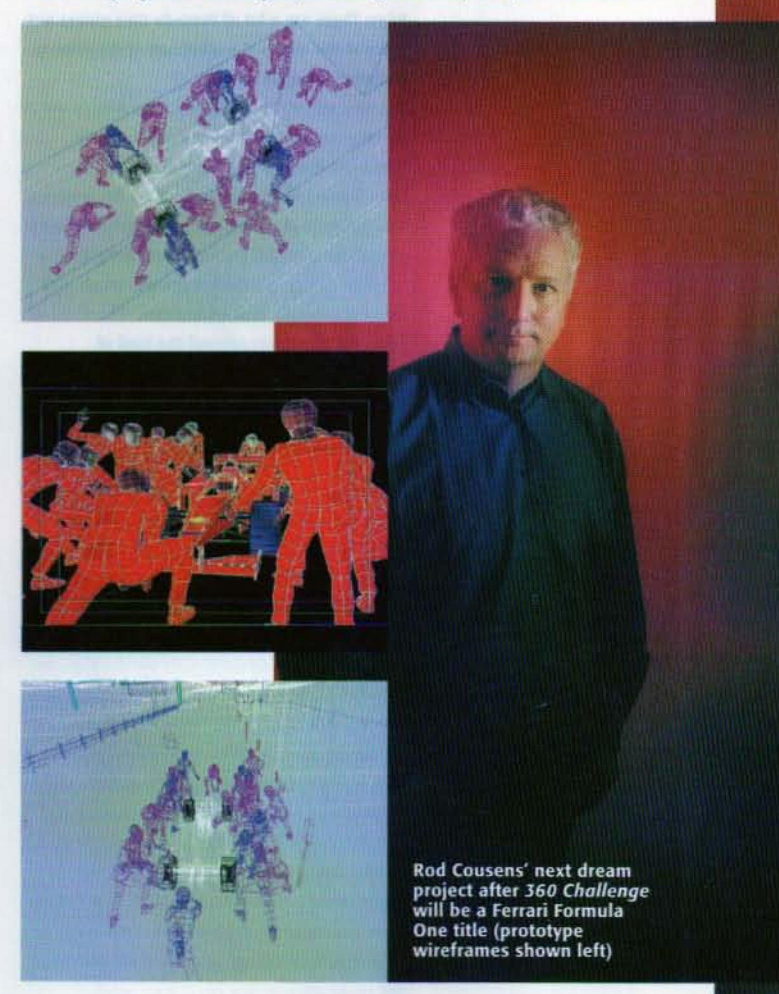
Edge: Do you think you'll ever get to a stage where Ferrari will share most of its information with you?

RC: I don't think we're there yet. I do believe that's the relationship and the bond that I would like to build between us. It would be great. I don't know if any other motor car manufacturer will ever quite get there in the type of relationship that I'm laying out to Ferrari. If we can achieve that, it's a great success. What I would be saying, if you look at the implications of this for a corporation, it's that we're going to commit a significant percentage of our available development resource to this project and Ferrari over the coming years.

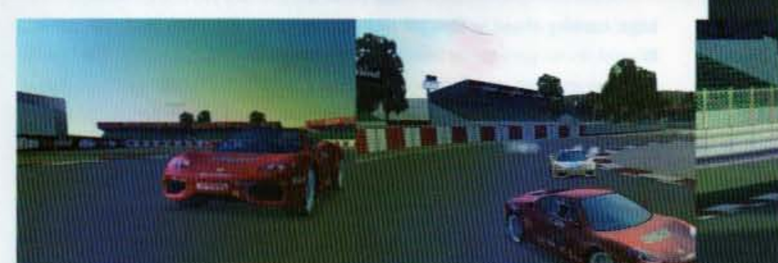
The road ahead

Edge: Where do you see the racing genre going, with the arrival of new machines such as PlayStation2?

RC: Most people would make an observation and say that the racing category is too congested and you shouldn't go and participate in it. I don't believe that. As some other software house said, it's all in the game. With Ferrari and *Vanishing Point* I think we gain a significant share of the racing sector. The thing that I don't want to happen is the comparisons. For me, *Vanishing Point* isn't *Gran Turismo*. Look at *Vanishing Point* in terms of where it's going, the feel of the game, how that game actually drives, and make the



Rod Cousens' next dream project after *360 Challenge* will be a Ferrari Formula One title (prototype wireframes shown left)





distinction between the two. I would contend that it's actually a better game.

That's what's got us off on this stuff; it's in the game, it's the drive, it's the feel, it's the realism. It's in *Vanishing Point* and I believe we've got it in Ferrari, and I think Ferrari is going to be a hell of an exciting product out there, and so I think we'll be the company to knock the spots off in racing games. I think we take pole position.

So where does the hardware go? Who wins? That's the debate, because this time round you've got four competing systems, some would maintain that it's only three, but you'd have to say everyone has to go out and prove themselves again. In Japan, has Sony gone too early? Is there a lack of software? Is it regarded as a DVD player? What will change when *Gran Turismo* really hits it and *Tekken* hits it and so forth? Yes, it's done well, but I'm not sure it's done as well as people had anticipated, and I'm sure that with the launch in the western markets, that machine is going to come out at a certain price point so that it distinguishes itself from a DVD player. It's going to come out with 30 titles so it's got a catalogue and I'm not sure that being backwardly compatible is an advantage.

And then you've got the issue of who wins out of Microsoft and Sony, and in certain quarters there are some people who believe that Japan is definitely a Sony market, but the US market is going to be a battle royale out there and Microsoft may win that one. I don't know, I think Nintendo sits in a parallel universe to both those formats but I'll tell you what I do know: it's great being a multiformat publisher.

Edge: To close on a general note, do you see a danger of losing certain types of games as the market moves even further towards mainstream acceptance?

RC: I think the thing you touched on is defining games, and that's the most difficult thing. I think games change and games evolve and games as we know them today are not the games of tomorrow. And we'll sit here and we'll be excited about Ferrari, and that is the closest some people will get to the realism of a Ferrari, so you're fulfilling dreams in that extent. On the other side, play *Space Invaders* on your WAP phone in the future. I think portable gaming is going to be fantastic – I'm looking forward to GBA. I actually think it's a far more significant leap than other people are making it out to be, and I can't understand why Sony hasn't done it. The Walkman company, right? This is where it should be at but it's focused on PS2 today.

Someone's going to discover the next *Tetris*. Why did *Pokémon* succeed? I remember going to Nintendo, years ago, and they were talking to me about it and they were uncertain as to whether it would be acceptable to the US market. But you go to the US and it's *Pokémon* country. I think the Japanese development companies are much better at taking a global view than western companies and they will plan for the longer term and they will make the commitment, and they will go with the bigger teams, and they will be more experimental. And we've got to do all of that. You never stop learning in this business – when you think you know it all, you lose. But yes, a lot to learn, a lot to do. Paths to go down, mountains to climb, and Ferrari games to publish.

TESTSCREEN

The definitive monthly assessment of the world's latest videogames

Body form

No one would disagree that the inclusion of real vehicles in racing games has substantially boosted efforts towards achieving true-to-life experiences over the last couple of years. After all, there's something perpetually unsettling about not dealing with the genuine article. It's not unlike owning a £12,000 Porsche 356 Carrera replica rather than the £40,000+ original. That VW engine growl may please the casual passer-by, but deep down you know you won't be truly satisfied until you hear the unmistakable purr of Porsche engineering.

However, most of today's licensing deals carry with them a heavy price that is, increasingly, difficult to ignore. Ultimately it's one that interferes with gameplay. It is lack of car damage. While developers have concentrated on improving handling dynamics and visual detail, this area of realism has not seemed too important. But the arrival of the 128bit generation has thrust it into the limelight.

Imagine you're racing around *GT2000*'s Seattle track. As you approach a bend with the speedometer's needle stabbing into triple figures you suddenly suffer from a momentary brain-finger pathway disruption, sending you bonnet-first into the armco. Your car simply comes to an immediate halt and a two-point turn gets you back into the action. Given the detail of the game's other aspects, you can't help feeling short changed. For playability, reasonably authentic collision dynamics bring a whole new set of consequences. Think Konami's *Thrill Drive* coin-op. If nothing else, it discourages cheats from bouncing their way around tracks or using opponents as braking aids.

Trouble is, most car manufacturers won't allow their cars to suffer visual damage in-game. Some of them even force licensing contracts that specify their products are not allowed to flip over. This is the case with Polyphony's *Gran Turismo* series (although **Edge** feels the developer is in a position to put more pressure on the manufacturers). The polygonal machinery in Square's *Type-S* may be able to roll, but visual damage is not incurred.

Licensed rally games have no such small print. Mechanical destruction is fundamental. And whereas once you would have been lucky to see a dislodged spoiler, F1 games have undergone a damage revolution, with blown tyres, severed wheels and mechanical failures becoming the norm. It's time for all racing games to follow suit. Drop the damage-prohibiting licensing for the sake of improved playability.







Cars in Square's *Type-S* (left) can roll – so why can't *GT2000*'s (centre)? Both would benefit tremendously from visual damage and realistic collision dynamics. As would *RRV* (right)

Every issue, **Edge** evaluates the best, most interesting, hyped, innovative or promising games on a scale of ten, where five naturally represents the middle value. A game receiving a 'seven out of ten', for example, is a very competent title with noticeable flaws but which should still appeal to a considerable range of players. It does, after all, score two points above average and should therefore not be considered as such.

Edge's rating system is fair, progressive and balanced. An average game deserves an average mark – not, as many believe, seven out of ten.

Videogames on the Edge

This month's PS2-shunning clutch of softs



Ridge Racer (PS) Namco
The arrival of the rather average *RRV* prompted another look at the series' original. Amazingly, this six-year-old interpretation is still a lot more exciting.



Get Bass (DC) Sega
One of **Edge**'s favourite DC games, this regularly gets extensive spins in the office's 128bit console. Threeplayer season games make it sociable fun, too.



Strider (PS) Capcom
Stupidly frustrating it can be, but few games can claim to be as inventive and as daring as Capcom's 1989 futuristic ninja romp. Nor are they as replayable.



Cannon Fodder (GBC) Codemasters
As deadline approached, Jon Hare turned up in **Edge**'s office with a Game Boy Color version of one of his past creations. And it's a great little package.

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TEKKEN TAG TOURNAMENT



It might look a whole lot prettier – fighters are incredibly detailed and brilliantly animated – but this is merely a revamped version of *Tekken 3*

Kicking off the five-year-old *Tekken* franchise on Sony's new 128bit hardware with an arcade conversion was always going to present Namco with something of a dilemma. Given the worryingly short development time afforded to the team (*Tekken Tag Tournament* originally formed part of the proposed launch line-up), the prospect of converting an existing game must have seemed particularly appealing.

So what if *TTT* failed to drag arcade goers away from their established beat 'em up brands? Here was the easiest solution – other than inserting any of the PS1 *Tekken* titles into the disc drive – allowing zealous PS2 adopters to get their fill of *Tekken* on their spanking new Sony box of silicon.

But from a development perspective the option was rather restricting. There would be little room for revolution. No real tinkering with play mechanics, new ideas or radical evolutionary moves forward. The blueprint was set before day one



Format: **PS2**

Publisher: **Namco**

Developer: **In-house**

Price: **¥6,800 (£40)**

Release: **Out now (Japan); TBA (UK)**





Backgrounds in *TTT* serve as eye candy only: unlike *DOA2*'s, there's no interaction with your surrounding world. But at least there's plenty to look at and the supporters surrounding the fights add massively to the moody atmosphere. It's just a shame the game's tag option is a strangely under-used feature

and other than the implementation of the usual *Tekken* console options there would be no straying from it.

Namco's reasoning is understandable. The same logic has been applied to the equally castrated *Ridge Racer V* (see p76) with massively disappointing results. It may be a new game, but it offers nothing that wasn't better implemented in previous versions. This is rehash territory. Players are entitled to expect substantially more than what's offered by Namco's first two PS2 ventures.

So gamers may be getting to play a 128bit version of *Tekken* but there's nothing here that could be regarded true next-generation material. Sure, visually things have improved, even if the potential hinted at by early tech demos has failed to fully materialise. Fighters are intricately modelled and excellently animated, background detail is impressive, and everything runs at the magic 60fps. For instance, whereas in *Tekken 3* True Ogre was a fairly unintelligible mass of polygons, here things are much improved. It's still a mass of little triangles, of course, but the result is now probably as menacing as the developer originally intended.

Under the higher number of polygons beats the same old heart, though. A good thing, given the series' heritage, but hardly good enough. Sure, there's the tag option which does force an alteration in fighting tactics (you can still fight one on one, should you wish), but it's clear that both *DOA2* (see p80) and *SF EX3* (p72) make better use of this option while also displaying a vitality that *TTT* fails to match, Namco's game feeling surprisingly sluggish.

There's nothing here that could be regarded as true next-generation material. Visually things **have improved, but potential hinted at by early tech demos** has failed to fully materialise



Most of the ground in *TTT* is uneven – a great detail. But it brings no gameplay implications





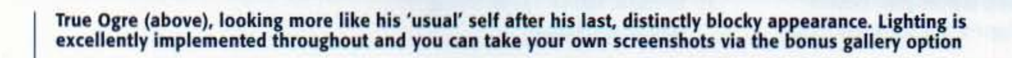











True Ogre (above), looking more like his 'usual' self after his last, distinctly blocky appearance. Lighting is excellently implemented throughout and you can take your own screenshots via the bonus gallery option









With the exception of Unknown's (above left), the end sequences for the characters use the ingame engine (top left, centre), though they are far shorter than previous *Tekken* end sequences. Because they're detached from the fighting arena, backgrounds can serve to break the illusion of a solid 3D world

Still, at least *TTT* places 39 Iron Fist Tournament contenders from the three previous games at your disposal – even if only one of the faces proves unfamiliar to *Tekken* devotees. Unlock ten of the 20 that you start with and a Tekken Bowl mini-game option appears in the menu. Proving even more disassociated from the beat 'em up world than *Tekken 3*'s volleyball, this requires two of your combatants to momentarily suppress their fighting instincts and engage in a game of ten-pin bowling. Its presence among the other usual options (vs, team battle, time attack, training, survival modes) is wonderfully abstract and the game itself proves at least as attractive as the main meat of the package.

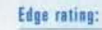
Yet the overall lack of innovation extends to the fighters' repertoire. New moves have been implemented while others tweaked, but overall the differences are disillusioning. You find yourself reverting to well-versed sequences and soon realise that you may as well stick to playing *Tekken 3* for all the difference this latest instalment makes.

This is *Tekken* as it's already been. Nothing more, hence something less. Videogaming doesn't stand still just so developers can hide the same material under finer polygonal cloaks, however beautiful. Anyone approaching the series for the first time should be impressed. It is, after all, a sound game. But previous *Tekkens* have improved significantly on their forebears, refining gameplay while bringing new elements into the mix. The Tekken Bowl option here simply isn't enough.





The bonus Tekken Bowl game works wonderfully well and its addictive quality is likely to take your mind off fighting for lengthy periods of time



Edge rating:

Six out of ten





Character detail is clearly more advanced than that of the 1999 *TTT* coin-op. But it falls some way short of the quality of, say, *Tekken 3*'s prerendered footage

STREET FIGHTER EX3



The game looks colourful, yet noticeably rough around the edges. Arika would no doubt blame rushed development for *EX3*'s visual deficiencies

To many who attended February's PlayStation Festival 2000 show, this was a far more exciting and rewarding proposition than Namco's *Tekken Tag Tournament* across the other side of the hall. But this isn't as surprising as it may initially seem. After all, *EX3*'s colourful world and frenetic, highly playable action should seduce the majority of beat 'em up fans with ease.

And then there's *Street Fighter*'s heritage, of course. Namco, with its *Tekken* series, may have muscled in of late, but Capcom retains a massively significant share of the fighting market. And while *TTT* looked decisively unfinished, *EX3* did not. Yes, it's a rushed release, but given the manga-led nature of the *EX* series' aesthetics, Arika ends up getting away with it better than Namco does. Of the game's visual failings, the most significant are relatively simplistic backgrounds and a helping of unintentional slowdown.

For a beat 'em up, *EX3* follows an unusual structure. The typical training







Format: **PlayStation2**

Publisher: **Capcom**

Developer: **Arika**

Price: **¥6,800 (£40)**

Release: **Out now (Japan) TBA (UK)**







Open up the extra nine characters (for a total of 26) and you're faced with a selection of familiar faces. As ever, E Honda doesn't make it

and versus options are here, but the main game consists of just six bouts.

The first has you fighting three CPU opponents while the second offers the traditional tag structure. As you progress through these you're allowed to take the last KO'd opponent with you – up to three can join your party. Interestingly, these characters can be controlled by a second player so that for the third battle, two human-controlled combatants could face up to first sub-boss Garuda. The fourth battle delivers more tag action, while

This is a more playable beast than its predecessors, sporting decent **visuals with some impressive** special effects during **outlandish combo sequences**

the fifth is two-on-one tag fighting, in your favour. The final stage sees your four characters lining up to receive turn-based punishment.

As with many aspects of the game, every bout offers sub-challenges of varying difficulty. Achieve these successfully and you gain a medal. The aim is obviously to acquire them all, unlocking myriad secrets – although non-Japanese readers will encounter problems when attempting to decipher what is required of them.

Arena mode is where the twoplayer action can be found. Oneplayer options (offering various fighting permutations) are still









Train Ace, your customisable character (top), and you can spend experience points on new moves which you can then use in the main game. The end sequence (centre) is one of the best ever (wait till you see it in action), though the game would benefit from offering a more substantial oneplayer mode

available, but it's the straight twoplayer tag mode that is likely to fully engage the majority of players. There's also a fourplayer setting, but serious players will probably stick to the two-on-two tag mode, as other options tend to disintegrate into free-for-all chaos. And that can be entertaining for all the wrong reasons.

A notable inclusion is the character edit mode, which allows you to build up a fighter by gaining experience points from completing a set of training engagements and spending those points on purchasing special moves. Again, the language barrier may make successful completion of some of the tasks rather difficult, but it's an interesting and worthy addition that should reveal its full potential once the western release arrives.

In play, while some of the sluggishness of the *EX* series (when put against the immediacy of the original *SF* games) remains, this is a more playable beast than its predecessors, sporting decent visuals with some impressive special effects during outlandish combo sequences.

SF and *EX* fans will port their skills across with immediate results, while newcomers shouldn't find things too daunting after a couple of bouts. Ultimately, *SF EX3* does everything it has to, without striving to stretch its values too far. Which is a shame – but you're still left with an eminently playable, totally engrossing and reasonably pretty-looking beat 'em up.

For a beat 'em up, *EX3* follows an unusual structure. As you progress through the bouts **you're allowed to take the last KO'd opponent with** you – up to three can join your party





The structure of the oneplayer game is refreshingly different, but don't expect any revolutionary touches when it comes to the core gameplay

Edge rating:

Seven out of ten

RIDGE RACER V









In typical traditional *Ridge* fashion, the seven tracks (which are reversible) share large sections. One is even identical to the original *Ridge Racer* circuit

Scenery is impressive but details such as glowing discs (right) should be better implemented



Anyone surprised at last month's appraisal of the disappointing *Sega GT* has perhaps failed to take an objective look at the general level of racing games these days. Of all the videogaming categories available to developers, this is arguably the one to have undergone the most advances in the last couple of years. It's a massively over-subscribed genre and competition is therefore absurdly fierce. Anyone unleashing substandard products on to the market simply can not expect to get away with it.

Still, presentation-wise *Ridge Racer V* is ahead of the pack. Boot the game up, spectate the opening sequence and a replay kicks in, enabling you to navigate the camera around a car. You'll notice headlights pop up whenever the vehicle enters a tunnel, brake discs glow red (though there's no fade in/out), sparks fly regularly out of the back as the suspension does its best to smooth out the bumps. The cars may not have the relief found in those from *GT2000*, but their poly count is high enough to make curves look curved – there are no jagged edges in *RRV*.

Presumably you'll soon get tired of watching cars go by and get the urge to drive one. You'll notice the menu offers no quick race option – you have to select a team and enter a championship. It's just a different way of doing things. Not the best way, perhaps, but not disastrous either. It does mean getting through a bewildering amount of front end, however, and while everything is wonderfully presented all you really want to do is to get your polygonal wheels around a polygonal track. Eventually,

FANTAVISION





Format: **PlayStation2**	
Publisher: **Namco**	
Developer: **In-house**	
Price: **¥6,800 (£40)**	
Release: **Out now (Japan)**	

The second view is mostly useless, placing the camera too close to the car's boot. Engine noise is shamefully weak



You need the odd jump here and there, of course – it's all part of the *Ridge* experience. Sadly, the series' structure is showing its age. If a follow-up is planned it should introduce some genuine evolutionary elements

after a tolerable (just) loading time, you're at the back of the grid with 13 competitors ahead of you, your finger maintaining a steady 7000rpm courtesy of the Dual Shock 2's analogue buttons.

On first approach, *RRV* feels like all *Ridge Racers*. But then you realise that for all the suspension travel witnessed during the replays, your car doesn't behave as though it features shock absorbers. The ride is more stifled than previous *Ridge* games, while redefining the notion of lift-off oversteer (the first three championships can be won without ever having to apply the brakes). Throwing your car around bends with ludicrous abandon is now easier than ever, meaning *Ridge* heads should find little problem in getting to the finish line ahead of the competition.

Trouble is, everything in *RRV* feels calculated. The way your car handles, the way it drifts through corners, the trajectory and infallibility of the CPU vehicles (except when they drive straight into you), and how the same voice samples play at specific circuit sections has all been predetermined at the development stage. That's true of all the *Ridge* games, of course, but somehow previous instalments have hidden it with more aplomb. Here things just feel oddly unrewarding.

Missing too, is the sense of speed usually associated with the *Ridge* series. Sure, better handling, faster cars and more powerful engines become available as you progress through the championships, but the road is too wide and the buildings too far back to properly convey the pace and thrill conveyed by the PS1 games.

That *RRV* is rushed should shock no one. But that it's less enthralling than its predecessors (with the possible exception of *Revolution*), should. For racing excitement it's up there with *Sega GT*. By *Ridge* standards this is a mostly soulless, unengaging and half-hearted attempt. By general racing game criteria it's just average. Like Sega, Namco is capable of much more.

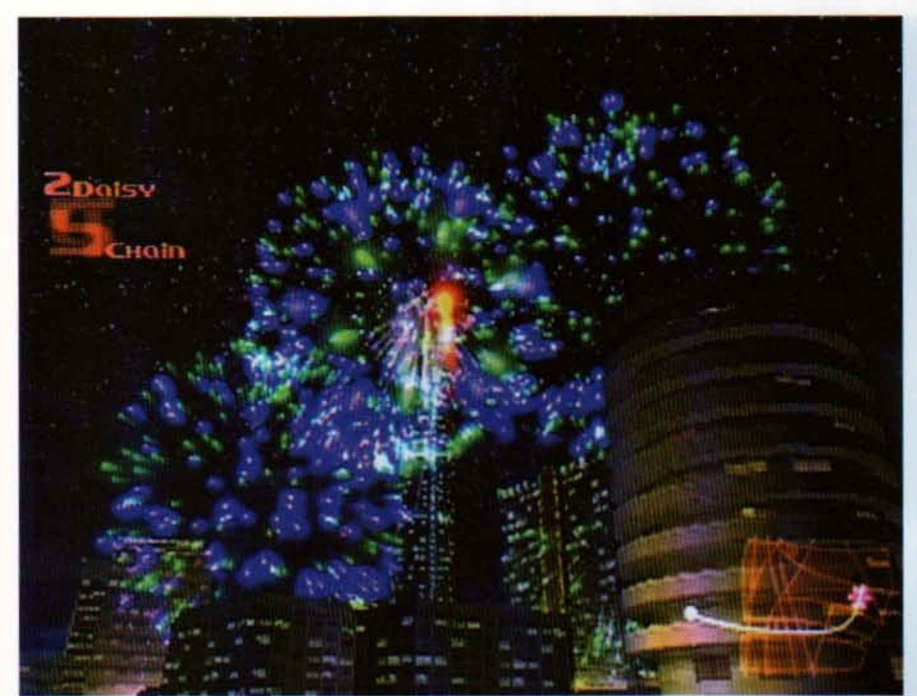
Edge rating:

Five out of ten



The twoplayer option seems feeble – when other PS2 racing games manage 60fps with all scenery still on

FANTAVISION







It may not push the PS2 to its technical boundaries (backdrops are not made up of zillions of polys), but *Fantavision* is a visually engaging experience







From top: Fireworks go up into the sky, you select them and then decide when to set them off... preferably before they die out. It's a winning formula

In the endless stream of sequels and copycat development hell that is the current videogaming world, the arrival of something quite unlike everything surrounding it should not be underestimated. Enter *Fantavision*, a dazzling ticket to a colourful puzzling land without the need for ingesting chemical additives.

On the surface, things are beautifully simplistic: waves of blue, green and orange fireworks are fired into the night sky and it's your role to link them together (using a combination of the left analogue stick and the X button) before detonating them (circle button). In reality it's a little harder than that. You must link a minimum of three, always according to colour. But for the big points it's preferable to get longer chains together. You link one colour chain to another by attaching a multicoloured firework between them. Before that happens, though, you've more than likely run out of time – wait too long and your already selected fireworks die out, taking with them precious energy. When your energy bar reaches zero, it's game over.



Hopefully the game's obscure nature won't dissuade too many casual gamers from parting with their cash. *Fantavision* deserves huge success

Although colour-based firework-linking in *Fantavision* works in multiples of three, there's nothing to stop you from joining four, five, seven or any number of similarly coloured fireworks together. So you could have four green, followed by three orange and five blue, for instance. How you link – and indeed how many you link – is decided by what turns up on your screen and what you decide works best, of course; but you're not given much time to waste. So as you're





Format: **PlayStation2**

Publisher: **SCEI**

Developer: **In-house**

Price: **¥6,800 (£40)**

Release: **Out now (Japan); TBA (UK)**





Save your replays and then enjoy the show through eight possible camera angles, as well as being able to add a multitude of effects, such as weather (rain or snow), psychedelia (which proves outrageously trippy), or translucency (top). Several levels of subtlety only reveal themselves after extensive play

working on what's already in the air keep an eye on the next wave of fireworks which is shown at the bottom of the screen – you can then decide which strategy to adopt. Hesitate and you're soon playing a desperate game of catch-up. Redemption is possible but it requires some swift thinking.

That's the simple way of playing *Fantavision*, but it is unlikely to get you very far into the first game – finish the eight levels and a selection of extras open up, including a harder version of the main event. The real way to enjoy SCEI's inspired puzzler is to discover the game's various levels of subtlety. For instance, setting off fireworks in the vicinity of other similarly coloured pyrotechnics sets off a chain reaction, so selecting anything and everything present on the screen is not necessary – you could miss other fireworks, hence losing you crucial energy. Instead, focus on where you're going to move your cursor next so as to maximise your chain potential.

On the surface, things are beautifully simplistic: waves of blue, green and orange **fireworks get fired into the night sky, and it's your role to link them together** before detonating them

In addition to fireworks popping up, stars, bonus points and energy icons make an occasional appearance, too. Work these into your chains and reap their rewards. The stars convert into letters spelling out S-T-A-R-M-I-N-E; once that's accomplished you're whisked off into a bonus round of pyrotechnical madness, where you set off and attempt to maintain an explosive chain until the timer reaches zero. Getting it right is an easy way of replenishing energy.

Simple enough, you conclude. Shallow, even. Before you know it, though, hours have passed, yet the 'one more go' factor remains firmly in place. This is the most impressive game to be powered by Sony's 128bit architecture to date, as well as being one of the most enjoyable titles **Edge** has had the fortune of getting its hands on in recent months. Along with DC's *Chu Chu Rocket*, it ranks among the most charmingly endearing and playable, too.

Edge rating:

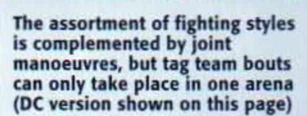
Eight out of ten



Presentation centres on 1950s American family imagery. But it will further confuse those unable to grasp *Fantavision*'s supremely odd concept

DEAD OR ALIVE 2





The assortment of fighting styles is complemented by joint manoeuvres, but tag team bouts can only take place in one arena (DC version shown on this page)







Dreamcast owners will be 'treated' to the sight of Kasumi and Ayane in school uniforms (above), but the basic gameplay remains the same in both versions

Whether or not you consider it to be in good taste, it will please some people that *Dead or Alive 2* continues the original's celebration of the natural glories displayed by the game's female stars. The more discerning gamer, though, will be more impressed by the equally alluring gameplay.

Initially available for Dreamcast in the US and PlayStation2 in Japan, Tecmo's beat 'em up has also been signed up by Acclaim for UK release. Eagle-eyed players will, of course, notice that the emphasis has slightly shifted to the underwear of the schoolgirlish combatants. The DC option still allows you to vary the level of 'bounce' displayed by characters, by varying the character's age.

But more significant are the involving and balletic contests at the heart of the game. The control system is intuitive, with a button each for punch and kick, as well as a third button which combines for holds and counters, though 3D movement can be initially confusing.

Counter attacks are now commonplace in beat 'em ups, but here they are particularly well executed and a critical skill for you to master, as in the original *Dead or Alive*. At times it is simply a joy to watch the elegant exchanges between fighters. There are a number of distinctive fighting styles on offer, and while some are arguably weaker than others, on the whole there is a fine balance.

Character animation is second to none, and bouts take place inside large, ostentatious arenas. It is possible in some areas to push your opponent through a window or down a ravine, in order to inflict damage and open up a new environment in which to fight. A masterful touch.

Of equal importance are the less obvious touches, such as the gentle slopes featured in some levels. Breath forms into clouds in an arctic environment and in other places water splashes at varying heights depending on the way it is struck. Walls and pillars can be used to increase damage to an opponent, particularly in an elevator surrounded by an electrified barrier. It's worth noting that the PS2 version





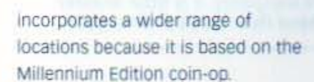


Format:	**DC/PS2**
Publisher:	**Tecmo**
Developer:	**In-house**
Price:	**$45/¥6,800 (£28/£40)**
Release:	**Out now (US/Jap)**



The PS2 version (shown on this page) features different outfits and more arenas. Graphically the game is only slightly more impressive than the DC version





incorporates a wider range of locations because it is based on the Millennium Edition coin-op.

The atmosphere generated by the spectacular backdrops is heightened by the use of prerendered cut-scenes between bouts in the story mode (the default oneplayer game). The quality of these scenes results in a genuine sense of involvement but it is all over far too quickly, as there is no way to extend the contest beyond one round per bout.

There is a time attack mode in which this is remedied, but this does without the rendered scenes and final boss that make the story mode so engaging. A survival mode has also been tacked on, though this does little to extend the longevity of the game. It is a shame that the lifespan of the DC version is further shortened by the fact that there are no extra costumes to unlock, in contrast to the PS2 iteration. A well-executed tag team option is also limited in its oneplayer incarnation, though this becomes more compelling in multiplayer mode.

Featuring multi-tiered, interactive environments akin to *Power Stone*, with more complex manoeuvres reminiscent of *Soul Calibur*, the game marks another step towards a true 3D beat 'em up. Crucially, though, it lacks the enormously captivating oneplayer game of the latter. It will no doubt take time to master the subtleties of the various characters, but the oneplayer experience is regretfully shortlived.

There is little to distinguish between the two versions in terms of gameplay. While Sony's console offers more luxuriant lighting effects, the animation is equally fluid on Sega's. The fact that the latter has fewer arenas and requires more concerted oneplayer effort to unlock costumes is critical, though, and is hardly outweighed by the provision of schoolgirl uniforms.

Featuring multi-tiered, interactive environments akin to *Power Stone*, with **more complex manoeuvres** reminiscent of *Soul Calibur*, this marks another step towards a **true 3D beat 'em up**

Edge rating:

Eight out of ten



The final level in the PlayStation2 version takes place in a dreamlike arena. In the Dreamcast version, the action is clearer

MDK2







With four arms and a wide variety of destructive weaponry, it is little wonder that Max is responsible for more onscreen violence than his two colleagues



MDK2 is one of the better-looking games available for the Dreamcast. Its selection of spot effects includes the output of an atomic toaster

From the first cut-scene and the loading screens with their cartoon graphics *à la* Jack Kirby through to the final boss, Bioware's sequel to *MDK* retains the offbeat humour and quirky originality that made the forerunner such a hit – with reviewers if not entirely with the gamebuying public. In a dramatic step away from the dictates of the original, two of Shiny's bit-part players are promoted to see a slice of the action.

Doctor Hawkins and Max, a nutty professor and a six-limbed dog with a penchant for action, join Kurt Hectic, mild-mannered janitor and the hero of the piece. Once again they must protect the Earth from aliens riding energy streams, intent on further destruction. Max and Hawkins add a new dimension to gameplay. While levels featuring Hectic are similar in tone to the original, a more direct approach is used to complete levels with Max, who has far more firepower than his human counterpart. While Hectic takes out switches using his sniper scope, Max simply destroys the scenery in order to progress.

The most radical departure from the gameplay of the original takes place with the doctor. It is not until he finds the components to produce a weapon – which is suitably bizarre – that he is able to take on the aliens in a firefight. Even then, most of his challenges are solved by the use of brains rather than brawn. To complete the more varied puzzles that he faces, Hawkins must use or combine items in his inventory, which vary from a toaster to hand towels. The range and outlandish nature of the armoury forces the player to think slightly laterally.

The doctor's first challenge involves taking on a number of aliens without a discernible weapon – with the knowledge that there is a large alien-eating plant in the corner of the



Hectic's sniper rifle makes a welcome return, with an exotic range of ammunition

While **levels featuring Hectic** are similar in tone to the original, **a more direct approach** is used to complete levels as Max, who has **far more firepower** than his human counterpart

EVOLVA



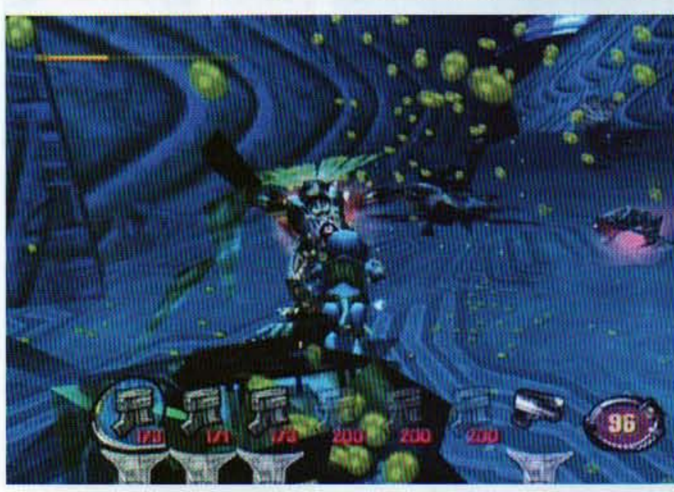

Format: **Dreamcast**

Publisher: **Interplay**

Developer: **Bioware**

Price: **£40**

Release: **Out now**




MDK2 **presents a varied collection of alien adversaries, ranging from the larger bosses at the end of levels (top left), through to jeering underlings (top right). The cannon-fodder variety frequent Max's levels, but must also be overcome by the more limited firepower of original hero Hectic (above right)**

room. The game also features a number of sub-levels that demand further dexterity from the player. Most of these are side-scrolling levels in the style of *Scramble*, in which various items of debris must be avoided, but one notable exception is that in which the player must guide a fish through pipes that are infested with mines and larger marine-life specimens.

The game looks impressive throughout, offering a variety of environments and well-realised aliens, as well as an apparently accurate map of the heavens during Hectic's early levels. The action moves swiftly from Earth to the corridors of the mobile space home, Jim Dandy, and beyond to the alien homeworld, peopled by jeering aliens and egocentric bosses. Large portions, though, are murky and dark to the point that it is a challenge simply to see what is happening.

It is perhaps fitting given the re-release of *Strider* packaged with *Strider 2* for the PlayStation (reviewed on p87) that, despite showing off advances in complexity and variety of gameplay, *MDK2* represents a throwback to the days when videogames were a great deal less placable. This is not necessarily a good thing, though. Some levels are simply capricious, particularly some of the subgames, and getting through them can be as much a matter of luck as it is skill. Many of the subgames also abandon the intuitive controls of other levels in favour of a more sluggish and rudimentary approach. In one level, for example, you need to avoid oncoming asteroids by simply moving up or down.

MDK2 is an audacious attempt to subvert conventional attitudes towards gameplay, representing a move away from fixed modes of play. For this, Bioware must be congratulated. But in execution, the various styles on offer do not gel as well as they might, being let down in places by careless design.

There's no doubting the value of many elements here – Bioware has taken Shiny's distinctive concepts and pushed them in interesting directions – but such rich potential has ultimately not been realised.

Edge rating:

Seven out of ten




The side-scrolling subgames are an amusing diversion, but surprisingly unforgiving. Limited controls do not help

EVOLVA









The number of aliens onscreen at once can result in hectic encounters (top right). In such circumstances you must eschew the long-range weaponry on offer and get down and dirty with the aliens (main). At this point it's a matter of hoping that other squad members are attacking in a similar fashion



The scenery offers a welcome diversion from the featureless corridors so often seen in PC titles. It also proves to be a critical gameplay component

Thrust to prominence by the release of the once-ubiquitous *Organic Art* package, little has been seen of Computer Artworks of late, until the recent announcement that a 'taster' version of *Evolva* would be bundled with cards carrying GeForce 256 hardware. However, it seems unlikely that this fully fledged game will capture the imagination of the media and public in the same way its arty curio predecessor did.

Set in a future in which genetic engineering is widespread, *Evolva* pits the player as the commander of a team of four genohunters, equipped only with the ability to mutate at will, against an unrelenting alien parasite. While the plot adds a topical element to the familiar litany of science-fiction B-movie fare, the game itself is an attempt to combine the apparent synergies between the firstperson and realtime strategy genres, with a handful of puzzle-solving elements thrown into the mix.

Fittingly for a game originating from a team headed by William Latham, *Evolva* is visually resplendent, boasting lush, interactive organic expanses to explore. Dynamic, scaleable graphics allow for a multitude of beautifully rendered adversaries at one time, as the genohunters are beset from all sides by swarming hordes. Enemy AI is particularly impressive, with attacks characterised by waves of insect-like aliens scurrying to engage in close-quarters combat, supported by the long-range bombardment of their flame-spitting cohorts. Indeed this cooperation between the wide variety of alien breeds is not merely dramatic onscreen but a significant component of gameplay.

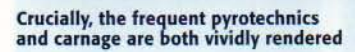
The ability of the genohunters to mutate at will provides a novel approach to the question of power-ups, since the bodies of destroyed aliens provide the raw genetic material to fashion weapons such as lasers and grenade launchers. But while some are slightly novel, including stealth options and a weapon that shoots homing insects, this feature is largely cosmetic. The only discernible difference to traditional shoot 'em ups is the necessity of butchering the local fauna to provide new weaponry.

And although there are apparently

Cooperation between the wide variety of aliens is not merely dramatic but a significant component **of gameplay. The ability of genohunters to mutate provides** a novel approach to power-ups







Crucially, the frequent pyrotechnics and carnage are both vividly rendered

Format:	**PC**
Publisher:	**Virgin**
Developer:	**Computer Artworks**
Price:	**£30**
Release:	**Out now**









A wide variety of genes can be collected from alien corpses, which can then be used to provide your genohunters with a range of weaponry

more than a billion different possible combinations of mutation, the evolution of genohunters is shaped to a large extent by a number of disappointingly linear puzzles. These require the interaction of a particular mutation and some part of the environment in order to progress, such as the destruction of impenetrable flora with the flame thrower, for example.

Also dissatisfying, given the developer's ambition of defying the constraints of a single genre, is the clumsy control interface that prevents the full exploitation of squad-based tactics, which are necessary to complete the game. This is only partly remedied by some noteworthy AI. It's a shame in that the use of four squad members, which in theory lends a strategic element to proceedings, is made slightly redundant.

At times the three genohunters provide excellent support, but there are too many moments of extreme stupidity; it is frustrating to see a laboriously stealthy approach undone by the reckless charge of a fellow squad member, and more so to see a genohunter jump into a pit of lava. These problems are even more apparent when playing a multiplayer game. It's extremely challenging to attempt to mutate a character while being shot at.



Effective cooperation between squad members is essential to progress, but the genohunter AI often leaves something to be desired

Essentially these shortcomings make it necessary to play the game as a thirdperson shoot 'em up and it is easy to forget about the option to control other genohunters except to leave them behind. Combined with the sophisticated threat presented by the aliens, and the sheer number of assailants, this results in an uneven challenge.

Evolva is a competent action game, setting an aesthetic standard for the new generation of PC graphics chips. Nonetheless, it represents a missed opportunity to push back gameplay boundaries. The emasculation of a large part of the player's firepower by a deficient control system produces a poorly paced challenge which ultimately leads to a frequently fruitless experience.

Edge rating:

Six out of ten

SOLDIER OF FORTUNE

Format: **PC**

Publisher: **Activision**

Developer: **Raven**

Price: **£30**

Release: **Out now**











The plentiful supply of ammunition results in a limited use of the trusty Pig Sticker combat knife. Though an effective weapon, it is not as satisfying as the more pyrokinetic variety at your disposal, all of which deal destruction in an exaggerated manner to countless numbers of faceless bad guys





The sniper rifle is essential to Mullins given his constant need to avert attention. It also enables pretty close-up views of exploding body parts

Despite its emphasis on blood and gore, the latest outing for the *Quake II* engine brings back memories of those other soldiers of fortune, The A-Team – if no one else can help, and if you can find him, maybe you can hire: John Mullins. As befits the right-wing, pro-gun agenda, the rather weak plot involves four nuclear warheads which have been stolen by an evil terrorist. The UN has wisely seen fit to employ a lone individual to destroy these warheads, which is where the player comes in.

Cinematic cut-scenes introduce the action, which takes place in several hotspots all over the world, from Kosovo to Iraq via New York. After the introductory levels, Mullins is assigned new missions by two compatriots, Hawk Parsons and Sam Gladstone. At key moments, Parsons makes a prerendered appearance introducing new objectives, or opening up a new area for Mullins to explore. Excellent graphics and a first-rate use of audio are evident from the early levels, set in a well-realised New York subway station, and serve to heighten the immersive sense of atmosphere and tension.

Also immediately obvious is the graphic depiction of violence. In a wise move, a parental lock can moderate the gore, but even with this disabled, a range of pseudo-realistic weaponry can blow the bad guys, literally, to pieces. However, the new lean command, in combination with the woefully inadequate enemy AI, will result in the sniper rifle being the weapon of choice for many players. Although the use of stealth is *de rigueur* right now, it requires the suspension of a large amount of disbelief to consider it possible to lean around a corner and take out a group of sentries standing only yards away, one by one. And yet throughout the game, battle-hardened mercenaries will react to somebody in the near vicinity being shot in the head by standing still. As the game develops, the threat increases by waves of attack which are triggered by the player's progress or proximity to a certain location, but this is a poor shortcut to alleviate deficient AI.

SOF is an above-average firstperson shooter. It doesn't bring much to the genre, save for its gory depiction of violence. Indeed, while the game is no more violent than any other game of its ilk, the combination of B-movie plot, cannon-fodder AI, reductive morality, pseudo-realistic setting and exaggerated violence is alarming, even in a title aimed at a mature audience.

Edge rating:

Seven out of ten

STRIDER HIRYU 1&2





Format:	**PlayStation**
Publisher:	**Capcom**
Developer:	**In-house**
Price:	**¥5,800 (£35)**
Release:	**Out now (Japan); May (UK)**

Contemporary visuals and old-school play: a mix worth checking

In terms of visual appeal and agility, Strider Hiryu ranks as one of the best characters ever designed. Combine his acrobatic skills with some wonderfully inventive and remarkably daring level design and you find a title that, even 11 years after its original arcade release, continues to impress. The game's snowy mountainside section and the reverse-gravity level will forever be cited as some of videogaming's finest moments.

But *Strider 1* isn't on test here, although the 1989 original is included in the package with its sequel. Most will welcome this, even if it may surprise you how unforgiving and occasionally frustrating '80s games could be. The star of the show, *Strider 2*, has been converted from coin-op status, just like its predecessor. Immediately, you'll notice the game is easier – your character can now run on command, unleash special attacks and perform a life-saving double jump – where directional changes mid-jump are also possible.

Capcom has wisely refrained from tinkering too much with the original formula – all the major elements that made *Strider 1* such an irresistible proposition have been incorporated into the sequel. In a sense, then, this is more update material than a true successor.

Split into six missions (of which only three are initially available unless you complete *Strider 1*), *Strider 2* shouldn't take more than an hour to complete for those prepared to throw caution to the wind and charge in, aware that infinite-continue options allow progress at the stab of a button. Approach matters with a little more care, however, and you're rewarded with a better final ranking which should affect subsequent bonuses.

It's worth noting *Strider 2*'s presentation – a factor so often overlooked. It's simply gorgeous. From the sequences detailing objectives to the beautiful static manga-style images sandwiching missions, everything is done with tremendous panache. As is the way the game incorporates sprites running around polygonal backgrounds (bosses, too, are usually made of triangles), resulting in a mixture that suits the game's style particularly well.

Despite its use of 3D elements, it still looks like *Strider*, retains all the fundamental components and plays as wonderfully. Like most coin-op conversions, longevity is an issue, but this one's compellingly replayable. The resulting package is one arcade fans should not miss.

Edge rating:

Seven out of ten

The sequel retains all of its predecessor's main ingredients, ensuring the end result is as playable now as the original was some 11 years ago. Captivating static manga images are used for depicting the narrative (above)







Finishing the arcade-faithful *Strider* (above) opens up an extra level in *Strider 2*, and sailing through the latter also introduces new playable character Hien (top)

F1 2000

Format: **PlayStation**

Publisher: **EA**

Developer: **In-house**

Price: **£35**

Release: **Out now**

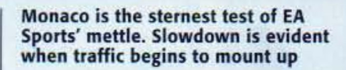




Qualifying can be a tense affair, which is improved with the addition of the 107 per cent rule. A flying lap option is available for more impatient drivers







Monaco is the sternest test of EA Sports' mettle. Slowdown is evident when traffic begins to mount up





Flags, weather effects, and stop/go penalties add an air of authenticity. Replays, however, prove disappointing, with poor viewing angles



"It will be a learning year for me," remarked F1's new golden boy, **Jenson Button**, before almost taking a point at Melbourne. "I will have to learn the circuits. I've only played them on my PlayStation so far." A remarkable statement and an indication of just how far driving simulations have come since the heady days of Namco's *Pole Position*.

Certainly, if Button were to pick up a copy of EA's first interpretation of the sport he would not be disappointed. This game is competent in all departments. All the tracks are faithfully reproduced, and, noticeably, corners have to be taken in the same gear as the drivers themselves would use. Roadside scenery clicks along at a good pace with little pop-up, and the sense of speed is convincing.

However, there is something hollow at the gameplay heart of *F1 2000*. Where **Edge** demands the thrill of pushing the new Jaguar R1 to its limits, clipping kerbs, rolling in and out of tight chicanes at 200mph and, most importantly, feeling as if competitors are doing their utmost to prevent a skillful overtaking manoeuvre, the game is merely as good as – but no better than – most of the other *F1* fodder that has come and gone through the office over the years.

It is disappointing that one year on this game is neither as visually stimulating nor as exciting as Psygnosis' *F1 '99*. Only in the AI department does EA's effort take the chequered flag – but, though the cars are less 'twitchy', the effect is still one of rivals avoiding rather than competing alongside you.

A quandary for any publisher of a Formula One game is finding that delicate balance between appealing to both the hardcore *F1* enthusiast who demands telemetry failure and oil leaks and the mass-market punter eager for an approximation of the sport with steering assist most definitely engaged. The fact that *F1 2000* only allows semi-automatic and not manual gearing is indication enough of EA's target audience.

In its defence, though, there are some delightful touches. Wheels which begin to wobble after receiving damage work themselves loose and then bounce across the track, which always raises a smile. And while white labels on fresh tyres are merely cosmetic, they do show that loving care has been lavished on the game.

Though not the fresh and exciting debut many had hoped to see, *F1 2000* at least proves to be the reliable and consistent Johnny Herbert of driving simulations.

Edge rating:

Six out of ten



Opponents' cars are far more brittle than your own, allowing for Schumacher-style tactics if all else fails



RIDGE RACER

As the fifth instalment of Namco's arcade-nurtured driving series hits home on PlayStation2 (see p76), a trip back to *Ridge*'s premier outing reveals an experience that has weathered the unrelenting ravages of time surprisingly favourably

The first *Ridge Racer* was a gaudy title, in stark contrast to later instalments such as *Rage* and, especially, *V*. But the vivid colours underline its coin-op roots – this is far from being a sim title

If ever a game signalled the arrival of a new age in videogaming, this was it. Never had such rich 3D environments been navigable from the armchair; the game romanced even the most cynical observers the instant they set eyes upon it, and laid the foundation stone for videogaming's inevitable move into the mass market.

The ambition of the project remains the stuff of legend. Namco's System 22 coin-op board was a terrifically capable lump of hardware, and with less than six months to rebuild the *Ridge Racer* experience in a convincing fashion using the relatively humble PS architecture Namco's staff performed sheer videogame-engineering magic.

With only two variations on one track, the immediately apparent delights were scant, but longevity was assured thanks to hidden playing modes and a selection of secret cars. And the core driving experience was a fiercely entrancing one, making the *RRV* experience seem comparatively limp. For a six-year-old game, that's no small feat.

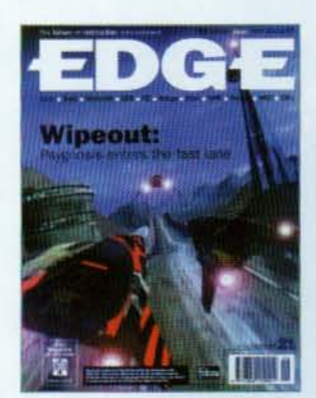


Getting air at this juncture made for a replay highlight (top left). The switch from afternoon to evening was handled with subtlety (top centre). Videogaming's most famous tunnel (top right)

Publisher: Namco	1994	Developer: In-house	PlayStation

EDGEVIEW

The videogames world never stands still, riding the breaking wave of advancing technology. In this regular column Edge puts the industry's progress in perspective with a look at yesteryear's headlines: five years ago this month



Edge issue 21, June 1995



Miyamoto-san: "[Others seem to] imitate the surface [of what we do] and end up making very badly balanced games"

The drive towards making videogames somehow 'cool' began here, with an **Edge** cover dedicated to the work of creatives at Psygnosis' Liverpool HQ. Inside the issue, talk of Leftfield and Apollo 440 contributing audio tracks for *Wipeout* hinted at a new direction for gaming (a path game designer Nick Burcombe continues to tread five years later with the forthcoming *N-Gen Racing* from his Curly Monsters codeshop).

Jarringly uncool by comparison, the 3DO format commanded eight pages of coverage further into the magazine, as **Edge** summarised its performance to date ('well over half a million' unit sales worldwide over a period of 18 months seems rather quaint today).

It was a good month for software, with *Tekken* and *Daytona USA* grabbing attention. But while the PlayStation and Saturn played host to textured polygons aplenty, *Gex* turned up on the 3DO, proving that the 2D platformer wasn't yet dead (it just smelt that way).

Elsewhere, **Shigeru Miyamoto** sat down with **Edge** for another 'Audience With'. Significantly, when asked about CD-ROM, the legendary Kyotoite replied: "I shouldn't talk about it..."









Clockwise from top left: futuristic racing gets its first outing in Edge; Sanyo joined Panasonic and Goldstar in the 3DO party with its TRY unit; 2D action in PlayStation *Gunner's Heaven*; ambitious Saturn *Daytona USA*

Did they really say that?

Shigeru Miyamoto: "Historically Nintendo is the only company that has sold more than ten million units of hardware. The claim that Sony or Sega would be able to sell as much hardware as Nintendo sounds uncertain."

Did Edge really say that?

'3DO has yet to play its trump card, of course: M2. Trip Hawkins could still have the last laugh...' Or he might give up on hardware completely

Testscreens (and ratings)

Tekken (PlayStation; 9/10), *Daytona USA* (Saturn; 8/10), *Bioforge* (PC; 7/10), *Gex* (3DO; 6/10)

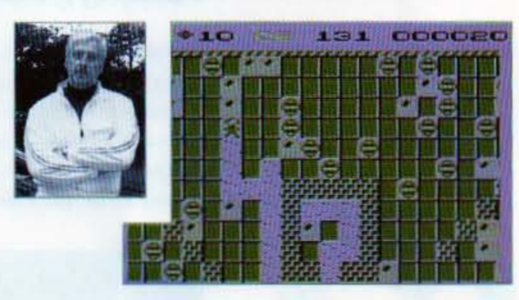
PIXELPERFECT

Every gamer has occasional moments of sparkling excitement, be it the first time *Speedball* booted up, or completing *Sabrewulf*. Here, Les Edgar, chairman of Vis Interactive (among other things), recalls a simple yet inspired action puzzler

It was with some relief that I was able to bin my Tandy TRS-80 model 1 and move to the awesome gaming power of a Commodore 64. However, it wasn't until the arrival of the Amiga that my imagination was stirred by what was about to happen...

While contemplating this, I whiled away many evening hours playing a freeware game called *Boulder Dash*. This was later officially released as *Emerald Mines* to a resounding silence in the market, mainly because everybody who had an Amiga or ST had already played it to death. It was a shame because, as far as puzzle games go, it was brilliant – essentially a four-way-scrolling-sort-of-topdown-perspective-collect-the-diamonds-while-pushing-things-and-not-letting-other-things-drop-on-your-head-or-eat-you affair.

Not so interesting, you say? Well, consider that this had a gazillion well-thought-out levels and another two gazillion twoplayer levels – all properly tested to require pixel-perfect timing. In my opinion it knocked the socks off *Lemmings* which didn't follow on for another five years or so. Oh, and it fitted into 16K of RAM, and it was free (sort of). If you get a chance to play this on your Amiga emulator on your 600MHz Pentium III, don't miss it! Then you can tell me what a sad bastard I was.



***Boulder Dash* is Les Edgar's preferred poison from yesteryear. The game enjoyed many sequels, of which this (above) was the first**



Technological Advance marches on

Japan: Will the new Game Boy Advance prove to be as enduring as its predecessor? It would have to see Nintendo through to the year 2010 to equal the Game Boy's popularity. Whatever the case, the company has started the publicity ball rolling by releasing a series of artist's impressions of what the final unit will look like.

Official details on the unit remain scant, but it's the 32bit RISC CPU, developed by the Cambridge-based ARM corporation (which provides advanced mobile phone technology), that is the most intriguing part of the deal, allowing the unit to deliver Internet access via cellular phone connection. This will allow users to exchange email messages, participate in multiplayer games, download software and even chat online.

Nintendo chairman Hiroshi Yamauchi emphasises that the GBA will be a personal communications terminal as well as a gaming system, with Mobile 21 brought on board to develop for Dolphin and GBA to ensure that connectivity between the two remains smooth.

Backwardly compatible and with double the battery lifespan of the Game Boy Colour, the next-generation Nintendo handheld is shaping up to be a very neat package. Nintendo expects to bring it to market in Japan this year for under ¥11,000 (approx. £62).

As for how the final unit *will* look, don't give too much credit to these outlandish designs. And don't take the mocked-up *Super Mario 64* as an indication of power, either.







In order to be efficiently portable, consumer tech has to be eminently practical: these curves may look sexy, but the finished device will be more akin to a palmtop organiser in shape

Pushing game development back into the bedroom

UK: Following the success of its *eJay* music titles, FastTrak Software is hoping its new software will create a new generation of bedroom coders to invigorate the industry. The *DIV Games Studio* package introduces amateurs to the creation of sprite-based games.

Comprehensive tutorials and sound and image libraries are included, and the system uses an abbreviated programming language based on C and *Pascal*. Plus, it's open-ended enough for experienced programmers to use, even if it is only to test concepts and rough ideas.

A planned upgrade will allow users to create games in 3D, but the initial release will be enough to create a wide variety of games, including titles based on established coin-op and console favourites. Once created, games will be royalty free, which should further attract budding coders.











These four titles were all created using the package. Users will be able to exchange codes and ideas on the *Game Studio* Web site at **www.div-arena.com**



Game Boy software joins big league







UK: With software production lead times of three months not uncommon, the Game Boy has always been the most accessible console platform from a development perspective. But Infogrames' *Martian Alert* is bucking the trend, with a 'proper', near-£1m budget and a two-year development cycle – stats more akin to a fully fledged PlayStation or PC project.

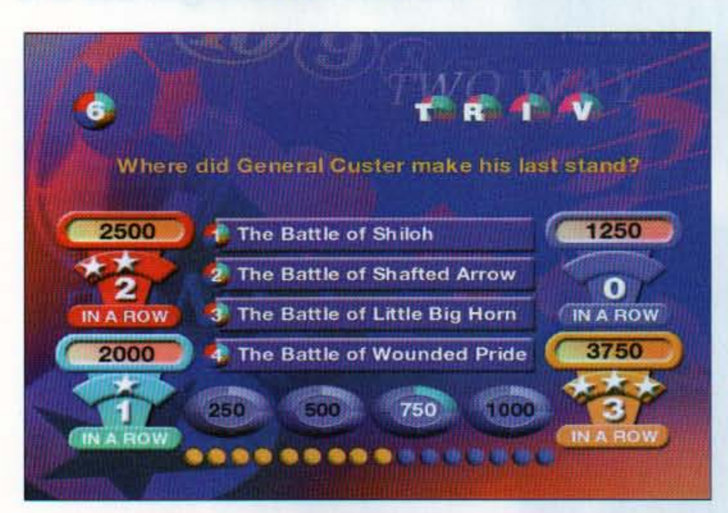
Why is the company spending so much time and money on the project? Because its intention is to make it the 'next *Pokémon*'. It's doing this by exploiting the dozens of cartoon characters made available through its licensing deal with Warner Bros. So, instead of Pikachu and Bulbasaur, gamers will be presented with the likes of Daffy Duck and Foghorn Leghorn – like, *Pokémon*, players will be able to share characters by linking two Game Boy units. Handheld gamers will be able to see if Infogrames' cash and time has been well spent when *Martian Alert* launches on May 10.

Counting the money men



UK: Bedroom coders of the '80s have once more made it high on this year's *Sunday Times* Rich List. *Starglider* programmer Jez San (pictured) cruised into 198th place, with a cool £150m fortune, while Codemasters' David and Richard Darling are said to be worth £80m. Rare's Stamper Brothers might also be getting a few drinks in at the weekend – they came in at a respectable 271th place, with £115m. If not the earth, the geeks have certainly inherited a fortune.

UK tunes in to TV gaming





Two Way TV's line-up is far from suited to hardcore gamers. Viewers now have the opportunity to answer "Turkey" to all the questions posed in 'Family Fortunes'



UK: The country's first fully interactive TV games service was launched by Two Way TV in March. Using the Cable & Wireless Digital Platform, the service is now available to more than 85,000 homes in the Manchester area. Two Way TV games allow up to four players in each home to play simultaneously and compete for prizes. Games are not likely to appeal to the hardcore gamer, however, as they consist of simple titles such as *Minefield*, *Anorak*, *Two Way Triv* and *String 'Em In*. Trials have shown significant demand and new games will be introduced each week. The ultimate plan is for users to be able to join in with all their favourite TV gameshows, quizzes and sporting events.

Although initially taking advantage of cable's realtime, two-way broadband function, Two Way TV's system architecture can be operated across any platform, making worldwide access viable through digital cable, satellite and terrestrial viewing.





Taking the Pez

US: Something of a black market has emerged on the Internet for Pez collectables, and it's being driven in part by Nintendo characters, with this 1998 range of popular faces (right) demanding a $32 price tag. Readers who remember buying the quirky dispensers while on holiday in Majorca might benefit from a quick search in the loft – though never taking off in Britain, certain Pez products have been traded for up to $300 in the US.

Pez still retains a strong presence in the market place and has diversified in range to include watches, pens and fridge magnets.







If Nintendo characters aren't your bag, Warner stars Taz, Bugs and Tweety feature on these Pez pens. At $11 for all three, are these the future of dot.com investment?



The Force is strong in this one

Canada: Sci-fi nuts have taken fanaticism to the next level: the race is on to construct the first fully functional light saber.

Dr Marc Nantel of Photonics Research Ontario has been working with laser technology for most of his career and is busy attempting to fashion his very own Jedi-style weapon. The self-limiting length of the energy blade is the most difficult obstacle, he observes: "Laser beams are parallel rays of light. They'll go very far at the same intensity." Nantel also points out that a laser sword without a fixed length could be a liability. "If you were in a circus-type situation in an arena, the characters would kill everyone," he suggests.

A simple way of preventing the beam from going on forever, as he notes, is to use a hacksaw-like design where a reflective absorbent tip could keep the distance down to a metre (the cost clearly being to the authenticity of the device's aesthetic). Nantel has also been working with a design which focuses parallel lasers in a tall X shape. Though not strong enough to cut through metal objects unless the beam is directly focused for a period of time, the laser blade could sever a head without burning a hole in the ceiling. Which will no doubt be worrying news to anyone living in the proximity of any comic stores or Games Workshop outlets.





These light saber examples are built using Grafflex camera flashes and will cause no harm. Fortunately



Computers plot future of personal air transport

US: Computers are now used in just about every field, so it takes a special kind of non-gaming application to make it into these pages. And here's one. Though questions are still being raised about the reliability of the latest Moller Skycar (if the engine cuts out gliding is not an option) the company's president, **Paul Moller**, remains optimistic about the vehicle's practical and commercial potential.

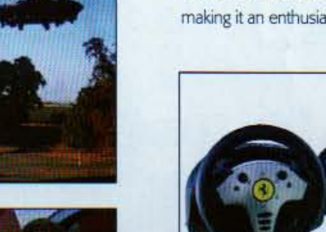
The M400 Volantor uses the latest VTOL technology and is operated by a fly-by-wire system. Computers control most of the navigation and cruise abilities while responding to minor inputs by the pilot. The car boasts speeds of up to 350mph at 15 miles per gallon and a safety parachute is included in case of emergencies.

Moller International is already taking deposits, and the eventual price is expected to clock in at around $80,000. If Moller can realise his ambitions, the Skycar could bring joy to George Jetson-wannabe suburbanites everywhere.



Early models (above) used go-kart engines to provide lift-off. Will the Skycar replace the Nissan Skyline GTR as *the* status symbol among industry players?









Ferrari steers gamewards

UK: Guillemot's Ferrari-licensed steering wheel has motored into **Edge**'s office, revealing itself to be the definitive unit of its type. Available for PlayStation, Dreamcast and PC, its strong, sturdy feel and force feedback should give even the most reckless driver a responsive ride. The gearstick is suitably effective, and with extra gear levers beneath the wheel within reach of outstretched fingers, there is scope for adapting racing styles for different games.

The PC version (tested) clocks in at £90, and the console versions will retail at a similar rate, making it an enthusiast's device.





Reverend exorcises resident evil



US: One in ten computers in America are possessed by Satan, it is being claimed. While increased storage capacity has proved a boon to most, Rev **Jim Peasboro** believes that an electronic version of the devil lurks on many a hard disk. After conducting lengthy research and gathering firsthand testimony from his parishioners, the Georgia clergyman has become increasingly concerned about these seedy drives. "I learned that many of my congregation became in touch with a dark force whenever they used their computers," he remarks. "Decent, happily married family men were drawn irresistible to pornographic Web sites and forced to witness unspeakable abominations."

In an upcoming book entitled 'The Devil in the Machine' the preacher outlines the most effective ways of preventing Lucifer from spreading his technological terror. These include regularly cleaning the hard drive, making frequent back-ups, and exercising extreme caution with a modem. Which, of course, is almost an anagram of demon.





Palm videogames go plug'n'play



US: Handspring, founded by the people behind the 3Com Palm Computing platform, hopes to transform handheld computing with its new device. The pocket-sized Visor is compatible with existing Palm Computing products and can be customised using an expansion slot. Planned expansion modules for the device range from MP3 audio players and digital cameras to wireless modems.

The modules are similar to Game Boy cartridges in appearance and ease of use. Although the device will clearly appeal largely to business users, there will be several game cartridges released for the system, as well as the prospect of networked games in the future. *Tiger Woods PGA Tour Golf* from EA Sports is already available, featuring gameplay that will be familiar to any players of similar golfing titles, albeit controlled with a stylus. Roll on Visor *Tetris*.



The handspring comes bundled with a cradle to allow the exchange of data between handheld and PC. Available in a range of colours, it's a cool counterpart to the PalmPilot

DataStream



Shigeru Miyamoto's anticipated release date for the next *Zelda* game on Dolphin: 2005
Number of chapters to be contained in the second *Shenmue* game: two to five
Literal English translation of the word *Shenmue*: cheesy
First day sales of Sega Saturn: 200,000
First day sales of Sony PlayStation: 100,000
First day sales of Sega Dreamcast: 150,000
First day sales of Sony PlayStation2: 980,000
Amount of digital TV households in the UK by 2004, as predicted by Datamonitor: 39m
Amount today: 9m
TV owners who watch daily: 78 per cent
Most popular TV show in America today: 'Who Wants To Be A Millionaire?' (32m viewers)
Viewing figures for the final episode of NBC's 11-year hit sitcom 'Cheers': 93.1m
Current top-grossing film in America after 26 weeks: 'American Beauty' ($98m)
Box office takings for 'Scream 3' after six weeks: $84.4
Percentage of young executives who in tests remembered the email address imnot@the happymanhonest.co.uk after five pints: 82 per cent
Amount who remembered tracy_smith106@dial.pipex.com: 34 per cent
Amount of A4 pages churned out by the **Edge** office laser printer since July 1996: 81,950

Swindon hosts UK's biggest LAN party

UK: Swindon Town Football Club provided the venue for I3, the biggest LAN party the UK has seen. A total of 440 gamers were invited to test their fragging abilities over a 56-hour period, from 9am on Friday March 24.

Though participants were asked to pay a nominal fee of £40 and bring their own PCs and monitors, the event was massively over-subscribed. Gameplay hopes to host a 1,000-gamer event before the year is out. Sales and marketing director **Andy Mee** was ebullient about the weekend.

"These events go from strength to strength," he claimed. "They allow gamers to pit their skills against one another in a competitive environment and in some cases learn a trick or two from some of the professional gamers." Sweden's top seed, Doomer, and arguably the UK's top two players, Hakeem and Sujoy Roy, were on hand to provide tips on how gamers could lose gracefully.

In the past, organisers have complained of hygiene difficulties at the event – apparently the most obsessive players demonstrate an odd fear of water. This time, I3 provided shower facilities and a list of cheap B&Bs for those seeking a scrub and at least one night of sleep. Sponsor Red Bull provided the pep-up for everyone else.





Multiplay.com offered the organisational nous. It all became a bit too much for some. Bless







Tarwater
Animals, Suns & Atoms
Kitty-Yo

If Berlin is the new Seattle, Kitty-Yo is its sub pop and Tarwater its Nirvana. To lazy English ears, they're the most accessible band on the German post-rock/electronica axis, as they sing in English. Tarwater are unlikely to cross over to mass acceptance with burgeoning pop sensibilities that are always tempered by stern experimentalism – for every draft of surging electro-pop there's a funereal drone. Precise and unsettling. The joys of Frühling.



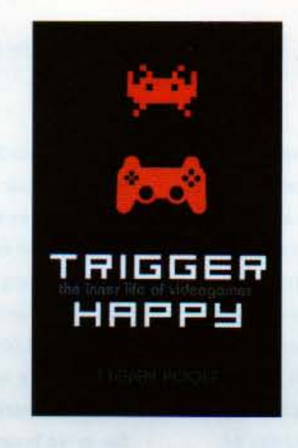
DJ Food
Kaleidoscope
(Ninja Tune)

DJ Food began as *nom de plume* for Coldcut's Matt Black and Jonathan Moore, producing the legendary series of DJ Brakes LPs in the early '90s. Now the DJ Food soubriquet has been bequeathed to Coldcut acolytes PC and Strictly Kev. In the five years since their last album, the DJ Food agenda has been tugged and stretched out of all recognition to incorporate jazz, noise jams, word collage and generous helpings of Debussy. Light years from the usual scratch-and-mix turntable fare, Kaleidoscope ushers in a new era of sample mania.



Sofa Surfers
Cargo
(Klein)

Austria's Sofa Surfers (along with Pole and Bernd Friedmann's Nu Dub Players from Germany) are finding inventive new techniques for spreading the deep bass manifesto. Cargo is built on rock solid percussion foundations underlying a visceral bass assault. They take the familiar spliff-fuelled dub of a thousand reggae sound systems, infusing it with a tough, icy cool befitting their own surroundings. Under the paving stones of Vienna, perhaps there really is a beach.



Author: **Steven Poole**
Publisher: **Fourth Estate**
ISBN: **1841151203**

TRIGGER HAPPY

They have been debated in the Houses of Parliament and the object of mass media scorn, while some say they pose a serious threat to the hitherto unshakeable might of Hollywood. The question is: how did games get to be so popular? In this unusual critique of games, Poole mixes the language of literary and film criticism with plain English to describe the evolutionary and revolutionary changes in games over the past three decades. 'Trigger Happy' is more than a timely reminisce over games history, it is a critical look at the creative achievements in games and the experiences they offer at the turn of the millennium. It is evidence of the broad public acceptance of games as something more than just kids' play things. That a highly regarded publisher such as Fourth Estate would print a book focusing on videogames is an indicator of the sea change in popular attitude.

Armed with a fanciful collection of erudite quotes and references, Poole draws the connections between games, popular culture, art and film. At times it becomes overblown, with cultural, philosophical and artistic luminaries such as Plato, TS Elliot and art historian E H Gombrich making guest appearances, but Poole's motive for this is clear. He attempts to elevate games criticism away from the hardcore gamer's viewpoint in favour of pseudo-highbrow deconstruction. No more 'the great bit is when you get to blow the monster's head off'. Poole is interested in defining and discussing the fundamental qualities by which all games can be compared and uses them to make a critique of the state of the art. Soundtracks, scripts, animation, gameplay, artificial intelligence, virtual environments, cybernetics and even ethics come under his microscope.

Poole feels most at home delving into game details, but makes a good stab at some philosophical issues in game creation, too. It's long been fashionable to talk about the convergence of film and games, but Poole is wary of those who predict the downfall of the Hollywood blockbuster, devoting significant space to arguing the fundamental differences between games and film, and mounting a convincing case for why their much-touted convergence would be pointless, not to mention disappointing. He believes that truly great games are those that create their own internally consistent world – with *Zelda: Ocarina of Time* meeting his the criteria in terms of internal coherence, but *Tomb Raider* falling pitifully short.

'Trigger Happy' explores how games interpret existentialism, linguistics, aesthetics, culture, their use of psychology and their status as works of art. It is perhaps the first serious attempt to understand just what makes some games great. Where it errs on the side of technical detail, it makes up for in enthusiasm and engaging argument. A seminal piece of work.



DataDyne Company
Site: *Perfect Dark* makers seek talent
URL: www.datadyne.com

DataDyne, the sinister-looking organisation featured in Rare's forthcoming title *Perfect Dark*, has positions available for enthusiastic graduates with a good degree. Careers range from gene-splicing technicians to forestry engineers and an enticing corporate package is promised.

The giant 'company' detailed on the Web site specialises in genetics, pharmaceuticals, and gene science and mirrors the company that is part of Joana Dark's nemesis. **Edge** can detect a clever publicity stunt. Judge the firm's credentials for yourself.



VIEWPOINT

EXPRESS YOURSELF IN **EDGE** – WRITE TO: LETTERS, **EDGE**, 30 MONMOUTH STREET, BATH BA1 2BW (email: **edge@futurenet.co.uk**)

I find your comments regarding female members of the *Thief 2: The Metal Age* development team (page 32, **E**82) to be ill-judged. In a cheap attempt to be female-friendly at the expense of your male readership, you suggest that a female influence explains a less violent, more suspenseful and intellectual approach to the game. While it is true that deft fighting could be employed in the original game, this was not due to a lack of female influence.

Thief was a pioneering title and as Steve Pearsall (*Thief 2* project director) attests in several online interviews, some levels were more stealth-based while others were more grounded in combat/exploration in an attempt to cover all bases and test the water. With fan feedback clearly supporting the stealth dynamic over combat, it is the former that has been refined and focused on for the sequel, leading to greater gameplay sophistication. Perhaps you think the the male two thirds of the dev team should employ their inferior intellects on mindlessly violent games and leave the development of *Thief 3* to the females?

Poof 'Antagonist' Daddy,
address withheld

Yes, the preview was supposed to land the editorial team loads of dates with super-fit ladies. Damn our foolish, misguided eyes.

In reply to Bruno Bonnell's statement (News, **E**83) that games should be shortened down to five to ten hours of gameplay: Sir, you have completely lost the plot on this one.

You only have to look at the history of gaming to see that longevity and replay is one of the greatest assets of the all-time-great game. It seems to me a disturbing suggestion that games should be getting shorter, one that was probably driven by the marketing monkeys who have no urge to develop great software.

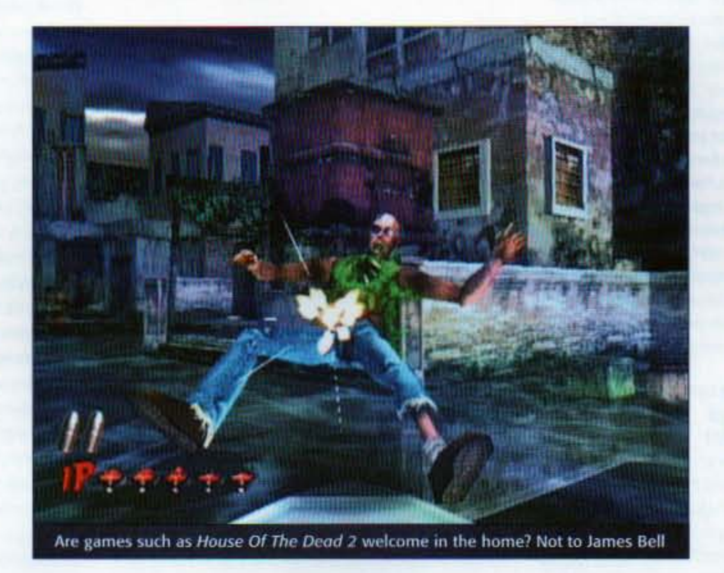
Were *Elite*, *Carrier Command* and *Monkey Island* short? *Zelda 64*, anyone? 20-plus hours, easily.

However, if you are having trouble releasing finished games, let me suggest that with the explosion of the Internet, there is a modern alternative. Ship a game with around 20 hours of solid gameplay, and then commit to developing the replay value with multiplayer and add-ons.

Consider *Half-Life*, and then consider add-ons like *Opposing Force*, *Counter Strike* and *Team Fortress Classic*. They all add significantly to the longevity and status of their title and developer. They also energise the fans. For example, I run a successful Web site with over 14,000 words of advice and guidance on just one character from *TFC*. If *Half-Life* had only had five to ten hours of gameplay would anyone be excited enough to create these add-ons? Would I have been bothered to write my site? I doubt it.

No more pathetically short games like *Driver* or *HOTD2*. Leave them in the arcade, please, Mr Bonnell. I want longer-lasting home games (roll on *TF2*), leaving the candy floss (such as *Crisis Zone*) as they are: short, sweet, and a pound a go.

James Bell,
via email



Are games such as *House Of The Dead 2* welcome in the home? Not to James Bell

'You made me analyse which titles I find myself returning to. **Titles such as *Tekken 3*,** *GT2* and *Mario 64* **never gather dust** for good reason: they are all **playable in chunks'**

There are clearly two sides to this argument. Spare a thought for two readers to whom Bruno Bonnell's words may have struck a chord...

The 'Size Matters' article in **E**82 raised one of the most relevant and interesting gaming issues for some time. I would regard myself as a keen gamer and devote as much time to games as is possible, considering I have to fit career and drinking into the equation.

You made me analyse which titles I find myself returning to. Titles such as *Tekken 3*, *GT2* and *Mario 64* never gather dust for good reason. Despite their size and complexity, they are all easily played in bite-size chunks: a few hours at a time. Titles such as *FFVIII* and even *Zelda 64* require days at a time to really get into. After a while they almost seem like a chore. Make games as big as you like, but they need to be easy to return to.

David Walker,
via email

I have always had a burning passion for gaming, from standing on upturned milk bottle crates to play *Space Invaders*, through nearly 20 home systems and countless credits in the arcades. But I recently realised that the amount of hours that I have time to play games each week is on a par with the number of original games being released this year.

The games market has almost lost its ability to inspire me to make the effort. I am in university, in a relationship and have a part-time job. Gone are the 12-hour playing shifts. How can I complete *FF Tactics* when I can only play it

irregularly? The gaming industry has aimed more towards the casual experience with each passing generation of systems. It will reach its sadly inevitable, logical conclusion once Microsoft has gatecrashed the party.

The only hopes are with innovative developers and network gaming, where the wheat can be separated from the chaff. Gaming still has something left to offer hardcore gamers for some time, despite all the crap they'll have to put up with.

Paul Powell, via email

Regarding E83, p59: 'Motion capture is one possible answer – even if it is merely used as a guideline for crayon-wielding staff to work from'.

Don't you think this is a little harsh? I find this statement somewhat annoying. I happen to edit motion capture. I've been in the games industry for as little as three months, after spending four years in post production.

I read your magazine because it's the only one I take seriously. I respect your views and enjoy reading the intelligent content. I don't expect comments such as this. I would hardly describe myself as a 'crayon wielder'. Motion capture is a good platform for up-and-coming character animators who wish to study movement and form – animators that don't yet have the necessary experience to create stunning 'hand-animated' moves.

Please could you refrain from using such narrow-minded comments in future.

K Ribbons, via email

Developers: are your visuals staff the weak link in the creative cycle when it comes to nous? Or are they merely misunderstood? We'll collate your responses and publish the findings in some sort of impressive-looking scientific fashion next issue.

I am bitterly disappointed with Sony. The Japanese launch of PS2 was the worst launch seen in the past ten years. It seems that most importers' opinions so far are of disappointment, not only because they are embarrassed to find out that almost £500 is spent on a machine which offers a few days worth of enjoyment at most, but because it offers absolutely nothing new. My friend and I spent the preceding week of the launch in anticipation of something really special: followed by dismay. *Ridge Racer V* is the only decent title of the crop and it is short lived for anyone remotely familiar with the franchise.

I have fond memories of the days I first switched on a console in the first week of the Japanese launch. Unfortunately the PS2 and its launch titles hold no special place. I read on the Net that Japanese shopkeepers were buying back PS2s for double the amount they sold them for shortly after stocks were exhausted. If I were resident in Tokyo I would take that offer and buy one back when some decent titles such as *GT2000* were on the release schedule.

I was in the US during the Japanese launch; I enquired about PS2 and found the average price to be $700-780. When I got back to the UK the average price of a PS2 was £1,000. I have since learned that auctions have driven the price up to a £1,500. Game importers in this country should be ashamed.

Richard Stringer, via email

'Is Ireland the only country that has Dreamcast, but no Internet **on consoles? Outside of Japan, hasn't Sony** sold more PlayStations per head of population here **than anywhere?'**

I went to my local importer on Wednesday to buy a PlayStation2. I walked out with a Dreamcast. PS2 release software must be the most lacklustre and disappointing of any new console. I almost felt guilty that I had not supported Sega's excellent machine upon its original release. PS2 software will of course eclipse its rivals as developers get to grips with the machine's difficult architecture. Until then, no amount of technical promise will make up for a lack of truly next generation software. So I shall amuse myself with Sega's ever-expanding range of excellent DC titles.

David Steer, Hammersmith

You meant to send this to the official Dreamcast mag, didn't you?

There is often talk about how us Brits have lost our identity and culture. I think it's about time something drastic is done. It really annoys me how so many people buy new *FIFA* games every year, not knowing that there is a far superior footie series originating from ol' Blighty: *Actua Soccer*. Most people probably don't even realise that *FIFA* comes from the US, but they laugh at the Americans for their 'worse than even us' football abilities. We spend millions buying their inferior simulations of our own sport every few months.

It's not the public's fault for not knowing the ins and outs of the industry, but I think developers and publishers should do something about it. If every game originating from the UK had a small, recognisable logo on its box, next to the ELSPA age rating, I think it would encourage people to buy that product over an imported one. It would be unreasonable to think that publishers would take up this step immediately, so I call on the UK games community to start the ball rolling. In future, if you make a map, skin, mod – whatever – for release on the Net, just put 'UK' on the end of the name of the extra. This would let everyone know of the map's nationality and if we get enough quality maps with 'UK' on, it could show how great the British editing community really is.

This may be a bit harsh on the overseas industries, but it's not as if they just love our games. Take *Jet Force Gemini*. Look how badly it sold in the US, the country with the most N64s in the world. And Japan never buys anything from the west.

When a British film launches, it causes a huge splash in the English media. 'Waking Ned' was a mediocre film that wouldn't have got a look in if it had been from Hollywood. Instead, far too many people watched it for their own good. Let's show the world that there is more to Britain than Monty

Python, Lara Croft and the Spice Girls. Let's show them how stiff our upper lips really are.

Daniel 'Mad_Sk8er' Nemenyi,
via email

I have noticed many games companies are trying to merge many of their consoles into other mediums – it has already happened with the Dreamcast. But what is this leading to? Sony promises DVD compatibility and is looking to make the PS2 into an all-in-one entertainment machine. This may seem like a good idea, but then so did many of the games industry's failures at the time. I believe this merging will not win favour with the core games machine owner, but it could suit the average *T3* reader looking for the nicest piece of kit.

Merging is not always good news, as history has shown. With many 'all-in-ones' the final product is usually a compromise; tele-videos were small and unappealing compared with a widescreen television with a digital TV decoder and a quality VCR. I think the PS2 could end up as the computer version of tele-videos – once the PS2 is launched, DVD drives will dramatically improve and so could other planned components. Companies should stop trying to dominate all markets and concentrate on what they do best: produce good games.

Sony may make cracking TVs, but the best choice will ultimately be in the console plus the TV plus whatever else, however extravagant.

Simon Taylor,
via email

The PS2's DVD-playing capability isn't intended to compete with that of dedicated players – it's there as a mass-market consideration, not to appease movie hobbyists.

Now that Australia finally has its Dreamcast Web browser and an ISP set up, is Ireland the only country in the world that has Dreamcasts, but no Internet on consoles? Outside of Japan, hasn't Sony has sold more PlayStations per head of population in Ireland than anywhere? Even though we are admittedly a very small market, the 500,000 PlayStations sold here show that we do actually exist.

Sony set up a dedicated Irish SCEE office, and it has paid off. Sega Europe keeps telling us that it is in negotiations to have an Irish ISP, but it has been saying this since the European DC launch, and we've seen nothing yet. Apart from delays.

No wonder Sega can appear dead in this market, and I'd bet that other countries have been treated like shit by them, too. I love the Dreamcast and acknowledge that Sega has some fantastic titles for its machine, even if plenty of forthcoming titles have been delayed. But as a company that is supposed to provide some very basic things for its customers, I think Sega compares poorly to SCEE, which at least keeps half its promises.

Wes Webb,
via email

Next month's Sega feature will look into this area, along with a number of crucial others.

Why has **Edge** shied away from pointing out one of the most critical features of the PS2? Could it be that even Namco couldn't deliver what it had promised? Compare the original screenshots of *Tekken Tag*, populated by dozens of onlookers, to the screens recently seen in the press and on the Internet – a barren affair. I don't doubt that PS2 can deliver the quality shown in demo form. But **Edge** has done little to show this weak link. Instead, it is quite happy to continue comparing the Sony machine to Dreamcast and downplay Sega's attempts.

On one hand, **Edge** shouts how great PS2 is and then hangs its head in disapproval at the quality of titles available at launch. PS2 will conquer all and DC will ultimately only appeal to the arcade fan, and yes this is the first generation of PS2, but were you so forgiving with DC? **Edge** should consider its own perspective.

Keith Cox,
London

Sonic Adventure scored eight out of ten in **Edge**. Now go and read this month's PS2 game reviews.

Great article on PlayStation2 (News, E83). It's always nice to read **Edge**'s sober analysis after all the drooling hype that other magazines print. At the risk of sounding like a pervert, I'd be fascinated to know more about *The O Story*. How does a book that might be best described as one-handed reading translate into a game and how exactly will you play it? Dare I ask what peripherals might be involved?

Kevin O'Reilly,
via email

You are an ill man, Kevin.

I am tired of the negative press *Pokémon* has received in recent tabloids – all this talk of how *Pokémon* is the cause of many playground feuds, how it promotes greed and teaches cunning tactics to our children in order to succeed.

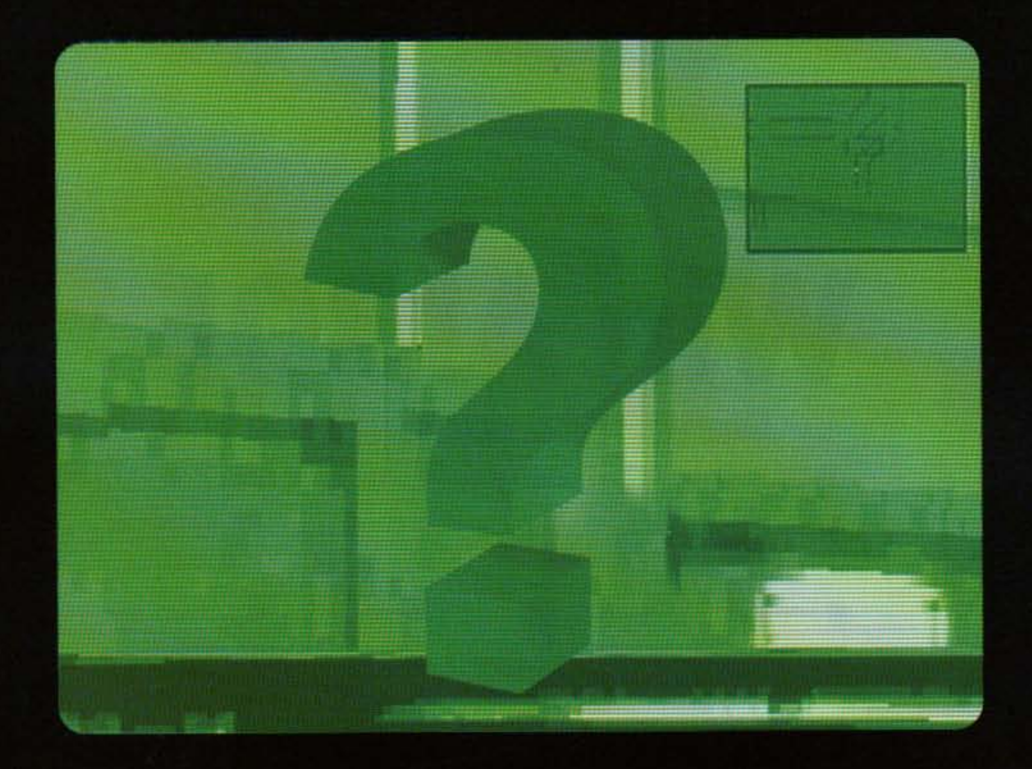
Pokémon is a product of Nintendo, a company renowned for its strong views on the importance of friends and family. It is designed to make money, but isn't that is true of any product from any profit-making company? *Pokémon* is a game of collection, nurturing and strategy. Its cartoon series clearly portrays the importance of friendship and teamwork. Greed and unsporting behaviour, depicted by the Rocket team, never succeed.

If kids can't behave themselves in a good manner when trading cards, then it is down to their own philosophy and code of conduct. Is *Pokémon* really the cause of all this greed and anger between children or is it just indicative of poor social behaviour among our children?

Of the disgruntled parents, how many actually know and understand *Pokémon* and of its underlining messages? Not many. So it leaves me to ask, what kind of person bases judgement due to their own ignorance? Computer gaming seems to be the scapegoat for so many social issues, and *Pokémon* just another avenue to escape the truth.

SaiTong Man,
via email

'PS2 could end up as the computer version of tele-videos. DVD drives will improve **dramatically, so could other** components. Companies should stop trying to **dominate all markets'**



Next month: **the sequel**

